SLAVERY
FROM
ISLAMIC
AND
CHRISTIAN
PERSPECTIVES
SAYYID SA'EED AKHTAR RIZVI

Publisher's Preface to the First Edition

Slavery is one of the oldest evils of society which defied the attempts of reformers forso many centuries. Ancient civilisations could not eradicate slavery, so they compromised with it. Some of these civilisations even patronised slavery. The Christian churches participated in slave-trade. Their priests blessed the ships carrying human cargo and admonished the slaves to be obedient, but never urged the masters tobe kind. As late as 1970, Roman Catholics purchased 1500 Indian girls because European girls did not like to live as nuns. Among all the religions it was only Islam that attacked the very foundations of this evil. But it is the irony of the history that the people who nourished slavery, supported it, and derived benefit from it, later became champions of its abolition.

'Allamah Sayyid Sa'eed Akhtar Rizvi, the Chief Missionary of Bilal Muslim Missionof Tanzania has very ably and pains takingly written this book. Like a research scholar that he is, he has objectively treated the theme of this book. He has marshalled fact after fact from history; quoted from the Holy Qur'an, the traditions, and contemporary writers on the subject; and cited Islamic and ancient laws. He has clearly and vividly shown that Western civilisation is not so great a champion of emancipation of slaves as it poses to be. In fact this book will prove to he an eye-opener for those who blindly nod in approval to the propaganda about Western humanism.

Peermahomed Ebrahim Trust proudly presents this volume to the readers and hopesthat it will gain approval of the public.

Trustees,

Peermahomed Ebrahim Trust Karachi, Pakistan

15 Jamadi I, 1392
27 June, 1972

Author's Preface To The Second Edition

This book was written on the request of late Haji Hasanali P. Ebrahim, who publish edit from Peermahomed Ebrahim Trust, Karachi, in 1972. It went out of stock verysoon, but the demand continues. Responding to that demand, my son, Hujjatul Islam Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi has now prepared this second edition.

Some minor changes have been made in chapters' arrangement; paragraphs have been added here and there; and my son has prepared the foot-notes which has enhanced the academic value of the book. May Allah grant him long life and strength him to serve the cause of true Islam with sincerity.

I am also thankful to all the friends who have contributed in any way to this publication.

S. S. A.
Rizvi Gopalpur (India)
28 November, 1987.

- Slavery in Ancient Times

"O you men!We have created you of a male and a female,and then We made you(into different) races and tribesso that you may know each other.Surely the most honourable of you with Allahis the one who is most pious among you;surely Allah Is All-Knowing & Aware."(The Qur'an 49:13)

Slavery was not an institution invented by Christianity or Islam. It was there longbefore these religions came into being. Just to give a glimpse of ancient slavery, letme quote from Justice Ameer Ali: The practice of slavery is coeval with human existence. Historically its traces arevisible in every age and in every nation… The Jews, the Greeks, the Romans and theancient Germans, people whose legal and social institutions have most affectedmodern manners and customs, recognised and practised both kinds of slavery,praedial servitude as well as household slavery. With establishment of the Westernand Northern barbarians on the ruins of the Roman empire, besides personal slavery,territorial servitude, scarcely known to the Romans, became general in all the newlysettled countries… The barbaric codes, like the Roman, regarded slavery as an ordinarycondition of mankind; and if any protection was afforded the slave, it was chiefly asthe property of his master, who alone, besides the State, had the power of the life anddeath over him.[1]

In Persia the palace of the Emperor had twelve thousand women slaves. When theByzantine Emperor sat on the throne, thousands of slaves remained in attendance withfull attention and hundreds of them bowed when he bent to put on his shoes. InGreece, the number of slaves was far greater than the number of free men, althoughGreece had produced great advocates of humanity and justice. Every Greek armywhich entered with ridings of victory over the enemy was followed by a host ofslaves. Aristotle, the famous ancient philosopher, while discussing the

questionwhether or not any one is intended by nature to he a slave, says, "There is nodifficulty in answering this question, on grounds both of reason and of fact. For thatsome should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient fromthe hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule." Then heconcludes, "… some men are by nature free, and others slave, and that for these lat-terslavery is both expedient and right."[2] With Imperial Rome, the slavery of theancient world reached its zenith, but when Roman Empire began its decline, the lot ofslaves began to improve in some tiny degrees. But the canker of slavery was tooevident. It had defeated the skill of Roman legality as it had defeated the subtlety ofGreek philosophy. To be compassionate with slaves was regarded not as a naturalfeeling but as a personal idiosyncrasy. The slave was hardly human; he had no right,he had no soul.[3]

At the time of the advent of Islam (in 7th century CE) slavery was rampantthroughout India, Persia, Rome, the Arabian Peninsula, Rumania and Greece. Theelite and educated class of these countries did not regard the slaves eligible even forthe basic human rights. He was regarded as a commodity not worthier than cattle.[4]Often he was sold cheaper than sheep and goat. On special social occasions thedistinguished citizens of the State used to get together with the Head of the State towatch the gladiatorial games in which the slaves were made to fight with swords andspears just like the shows of cock-fights and partridges in our old feudal society. Thepeople cheered the hands until one of the fighters was killed. The audience wouldthen applaud the winner heartily.[5]

On the one side, the Arabian Peninsula was surrounded by countries which still boretraces of the grandeur of the then declining Roman-Greek civilisation, and on theother side, by countries wrapped in Zoroastrianism and Hinduism. As mentionedabove, in all these countries slavery was a recognised institution. The twelve Tabletshad given its official seal of approval to this institution. The unmitigated hardship andcruelty which the slaves were made to suffer had not abated but, if anything, theslaves were now accepted as animals whose fate was only to work and die for thosewho owned them. I do not intend this book to be a chronicle of the inhumanity whichthe slaves suffered but suffice it to say that man must forever carry in his conscience asense of guilt for having once indulged in slavery.

Notes:

[1]. Ameer Ali, Spirit of Islam (London: University Paper-back, 1965), pp. 259-261;also see Will Durant, The Story of Civilization, vol. III (New York, 1944), p.397.

[2]. Aristotle, Politics, Book I, chp. 5 (New York: Modern Library, 1943), pp.58-60.

[3]. Durant, W., op. cit., vol. III, p., 397; vol. IV (New York, 1950), p.29.

[4]. Ibid.

[5]. Ibid.

Christianity and Slavery

Though slavery was an ancient institution which started in pre-historic era ofmankind, it is safe to say that the volume of this trade reached its zenith through theChristian nations of Europe and America who, as is their nature, turned it into ameticulously organised commerce and started capturing slaves by thousands. Beforewe describe the nefarious trade in slave started by the Portuguese, the Spaniards andother maritime powers of the Christian West for their newly acquired colonies, let ussee if Christianity, as a system and as a creed, did anything in the earliest period to all eviate the lot of slaves.

Justice Ameer Ali writes about Christianity:

It found slavery a recognised institution of the empire; it adopted the system without any endeavour to mitigate its baneful character, or promise its gradual abolition, or to improve the status of slaves. Under the civil law, slaves were mere chattels. They remained so under the Christian domination. Slavery had flourished among the Romans from the earliest times. The slaves whether of native or foreign birth, whether acquired by war or purchase, were regarded simply as chattels. Their masters possessed the power of life and death over them.. Christianity had failed utterly inabolishing slavery or alleviating its evil.[6]

Will Durant describes the position of the Church as follows:The Church did not condemn slavery. Orthodox and heretic, Roman and barbariana like assumed the institution to he natural and in-destructible. Pagan laws condemnedto slavery any free woman who married a slave; the laws of Constantine [a Christian emperor] ordered the woman to be executed, and the slave to be burned alive. The Emperor Gratian decreed that a slave who accused his master of any offence excep thigh treason to

the state should be burned alive at once, without inquiring into the justice of the charge.[7]

The only redress prescribed by Christianity is seen in the letter of St. Paul to a certain Philemon sending back to him his slave, Onessimus, with a recommendation to treat him well. Nothing more. It is interesting to note that the word "slave" of original Hebrew has been changed to "servant" in the Authorised Version of the Bible, and to"bond servant" in the Revised Standard Version, because, in words of The Concise Bible Commentary, "this word [i.e., slave] is avoided because of its association.[8]One wonders whether a translator has a right to change the original just because of"associations"?

It would be of interest to note here that the word "slave" is of European origin. Itcame into existence when the Franks used to supply the Spanish slave market with the"barbarians," and those captives happened to be mostly the people of Turkish originfrom the region known as Slovakia (now a part of Czechoslovakia). These people arecalled "Slav" and so all captives came to be known as "slaves".

The following quotation graphically shows the attitude of Islam and Christianity onthe subject of slavery and race:"

Take away the black man! I can have no discussion with him," exclaimed the Christian Archbishop Cyrus when the Arab conquerors had sent a deputation of their ablest men to discuss terms of surrender of the capital of Egypt, headed by Negro'Ubaydah as the ablest of them all. To the sacred Archbishop's astonishment, he wastold that this man was commissioned by General 'Amr; that the Moslems held Negroes and white men in equal respect judging a man by his character and not by hiscolour.[9]This episode gives you in a nutshell what I propose to explain at length in this booklet.

Notes:

[6]. Ameer Ali, op. cit., pp.260-261.

[7]. Lecky, W.E., History of European Morals, vol.II (New York, 1926), p.61, asquoted by Will Durant, op. cit., vol. IV, p.77.

[8]. Clarke, Rev. W.K.L., The Concise Bible Commentary (London: S.P.C.K., 1952),p.976.

[9]. Leeder, S.S., Veiled Mysteries of Egypt (London, 1912), p.332.

- Islam Attacks Slavery

Islam has often been represented by Christian writers as a religion which not onlytolerated slavery but also encouraged it. This is a serious accusation levelled against Islam, and in this book I propose to show its falsity. I would have taken, if possible,the charitable view that the charge against Islam is based on ignorance of facts, but Iam grieved to note that in majority of the critics the over flowing motive seems to be prejudice, and malice.

We have mentioned briefly the attitude of Christianity towards slavery, and more willbe said afterwards. Here, to begin with, let us have a look at Islam and its codes.

As far as slavery was concerned, Arabs in the pre-Islamic days were as bad offendersas their neighbours. Slaves were a commercial commodity, and slavery was anestablished institution. It was a source of livelihood for thousands and a source of labour for scores of thousands. To the elite, the number of slaves in the household wasa symbol of status.

This was the state of affairs at the advent of Islam. Slavery offended the spirit of Islamas much as idolatry did. But while the latter had its roots in spiritualism and hence could be countered by reason, slavery had its roots in commerce, in social structure, in agriculture undertakings; and reason alone was but a feeble weapon against a foe soinsidious and so deeply rooted. How was then slavery to be eradicated?

The ill-informed may well suggest that the Prophet of Islam could have used force.But the ineffectiveness of force for such purpose is well recognised by all dispassionate students of sociology. Force may achieve submission but it inevitably achieves hostility, and very often hostility is

so fierce that many a good cause hasbeen lost when force has been employed for its advancement. The sad plight of the Negroes of America is but one illustration of how ineffective the employment of forcecan be when the object is to achieve a social reform. The emancipation of slaves didnot change the attitude of the white masters towards their ex-slaves; and what a bitterlegacy of racial antipathy has it left! Toynbee writes, "The Blacks in the United Stateswho were emancipated jurisdically in 1862 are, with good reason, feeling now, morethan a century later, that they are still being denied full human rights by the white majority of their fellow-citizens.[1]

Islam's war against slavery aimed at changing the attitude and mentality of the wholesociety, so that after emancipation, slaves would become its full-fledged members,without any need of demonstrations, strikes, civil disobedience and racial riots. AndIslam achieved this seemingly impossible objective without any war. To say that Islam waged no war against slavery would not be a true statement. A war it waged, but awar in which neither sword was resorted to, nor blood was spilled.

Islam aimed at striking at the roots of its foe and created allies by arousing the fine rinstincts of its followers. A three-pronged attack on slavery was launched.

Firstly, Islam placed restrictions on acquisition of slaves. Prior to Islam, slavery waspractised with abandon. Debtors were made slaves, war captives were either killed ormade slaves. In weaker nations, people were hunted like animals, killed or capturedand reduced to slavery. Islam, in un ambiguous terms, forbade its followers to enslavepeople on any pretext. The only exception was an idolatrous enemy captured in a warwhich was fought either in self-defence or with the permission of the Prophet or hisrightful successors. This exception was, in words of Ameer Ali, "in order to serve asguarantee for the preservation of the lives of the captives."[2]

As 'Allamah Tabataba'i has described at great length, prior to Islam strong anddominant people, throughout the world, used to enslave weak persons without anyrestraint. Important among the "causes" of enslavement were the following threefactors:

1. War: The conqueror could do with the vanquished enemy whatever he liked. Hecould put the arrested soldiers to death, condemn them to slavery or otherwise keepthem under his authority or clutch.

2. Domination: A chief or ruler could enslave, depending on his sweet wish, anyone residing under his domain.

3. Guardianship: A father or grandfather had absolute authority over his offspring. He could sell or gift him or her away; could lend him or her to someone else, or exchangehim or her with another's son or daughter.

When Islam came on the scene, it nullified and negated the last two factors completely. No ruler or progenitor was allowed to treat his subjects or offspring as hisslaves. Every individual was bestowed with well-defined rights; the ruler and theruled, the progenitor and the offspring had to live within the limits prescribed byreligion; no one could transgress those limits.

And it drastically restricted the first cause, i.e., war, by allowing enslavement only ina war fought against unbelieving enemy. In no other way could anyone be enslaved.At the same time, Islam raised the status of slavery to that of a free man; and openedmany ways for their emancipation.[3]

Before slave trade was started on a large scale by the Westerners (when colonisationbegan), it was only in wars that men were made captives. But Islam did not permitwars of aggression. All the battles fought during the life-time of the Prophet were defensive battles. Not only this, an alternative was also introduced and enforced: "tolet the captives go free, either with or without any ransom "(The Qur'an 47:4). In the battles forced upon the Muslims, the Prophet had ordered very humane treatment ofthe prisoners who fell into Muslim hands. They could purchase their freedom on payment of small sums of money, and some of them were left off without any payment. It all depended upon the discretion of the Prophet or his rightful successors,keeping in view the safety of the Muslims and the extent of danger from the enemy.The captives of the very first Islamic battle, Badr, were freed on ransom (in form ofmoney or work like teaching ten Muslim children how to read and write), while thoseof the tribe of Tay were freed without any ransom.[4]

Even in such enslavement a condition was attached that a mother was not to beseparated from her child, nor brother from brother nor husband from wife nor onemember of a clan from his clan. The Prophet and the first Shi'ite Imam, 'Ali bin AbiTalib, prescribed severest penalties for anyone who took a free man into slavery:cutting off the hand of the culprit.

Ameer Ali writes in Mohammedan Law:

The possession of a slave by the Koranic laws was conditional on a bona-fide war,waged in self-defence, against idolatrous enemies; and it was permitted in order toserve as a guarantee for the preservation of the lives of the captives.. Mohammad found the custom existing among the pagan Arabs; he minimised the evil, and at thesame time laid down such strict rules that but for the perversity of his followers,slavery as a social institution would have ceased to exist with the discontinuance ofthe wars in which the Moslem [sic] nation were at first involved.The mutilation of the human body was also explicitly forbidden by Mohammad, andthe institution which flourished both in the Persian and the Byzantine empires wasdenounced in severe terms. Slavery by purchase was unknown during the reigns of thefirst four Caliphs, the khulafai-rashidin, 'the legitimate Caliphs' as they are called bythe Sunnis. There is, at least, no authentic record of any slave having been acquired by purchase during their tenure of office. But with the accession of the usurping house ofOmmeyya [sic] a change came over the spirit of Islam. Mu'awiyah was the first Muslim sovereign who introduced into the Mohammed an world the practice ofacquiring slaves by purchase. He was also the first to adopt the Byzantine custom ofguarding his women by eunuchs. During the reign of the early Abbasides the Shi'aImam Ja'far al-Sadiq preached against slavery, and his views were adopted by theMu'tazila. Karmath, who flourished in the ninth century of the Christian era ..seems tohave held slavery to be unlawful.[5]Thus we see that the earnest attempt of Islam to stop its followers from acquiring newslaves was foiled by Banu Umayyah. And I must record to the lasting disgrace of alarge number of Muslims that, in later times, they utterly ignored the precepts of theProphet and the injunctions of the Qur'an, and the Arabs too participated with the European Christians in the abominable slave-trade of East Africa. The West Africanslave-trade was totally in the hands of the European Christians.

Secondly, Islam commenced an active campaign to emancipate the slaves.Emancipation of slaves was declared to be expiation for a number of sins. This question is related to canonical laws of Islam, but we shall enumerate a few of them toshow how for small sins of commission the penalty imposed was manumission of slaves. For instance, if a man failed to fast without any reasonable excuse during the month of Ramadan, or if he failed to observe fast of i'tikaf or vow, etc, he had to free aslave for each day, in addition to fasting afterwards. Similarly, a slave had to be freedfor every breach of vow; or for tearing one's garment as a demonstration of grief onthe death of a spouse or child; or if a woman beat herself or cut or pulled her hair ingrief over the death of anyone; or for accidental homicide and, in some cases, even forint entionally killing a Muslim; or if a husband told his wife that she was to him likehis mother, and for many other trespasses.[6] From these instances, some of them trivial but deeply ingrained in Arab culture, one can see how religious laws were enacted for the emancipation of slaves, and the total eradication of the curse ofslavery from the society.

It may well be argued that by prescribing emancipation of slaves as penance for sins,Islam envisaged continuance of slavery as a permanent institution. This was not so.For every instance emancipation of a slave was prescribed as a penance, an alternativewas also prescribed - clearly indicating that Islam's objective was in time to create asociety free from this pernicious institution.[7]

Islam also declared that any slave woman who bore a child by her master could not besold and, on her master's death, she became automatically a free woman.[8] Moreover; in contrast to all previous customs, Islam ordained that the child born to aslave woman by her master should follow the status of the father.[9] Slaves weregiven a right to ransom themselves either on payment of an agreed sum or oncompletion of service for an agreed period. The legal term for this is mukatabah.Allah says in the Qur'an:

And those who seek a deed [of liberation] from among those [slaves] whom yourright hands possess, give them the writing (kitab) if you know of goodness in them,and give them of the wealth of Allah which He has given you.. (Qur'an 2433)The word kitab in the verse stands for the written contract between the slave and hismaster known as "mukatabah - deed of contract". The significant factor in mukatabahis

that when a slave desires to get into such a mutual written contract, the mastershould not refuse it.[10] In the verse quoted above, God has made it incumbent uponMuslims to help the slaves in getting liberated. When a slave wants to get himself freed, the master has not only to agree to it, but he is also directed to help the slavefrom his own wealth,[11] the only provision being the satisfaction to the effect thatthe slave would live a respectable life after earning his freedom. Thus, about 1400years ago Islam dealt in the most effective way a death blow to slavery.

It also directed that the slaves seeking freedom should be helped from the public treasury (baytul mal).[12] Thus, as a last resort, the Prophet and his rightfulsuccessors were to provide ransom for the slaves out of state coffers. The Qur'an recognises the emancipation of slaves as one of the permissible expenditures of almsand charity. (See the Qur'an 9:60, 2:177.)

It is worth remembering that a slave automatically became free if the master cut hisear or blinded his eye.[13] Also if the slaves, living in an Islamic state, accepted Islambefore their masters, then they would become free automatically. If the slave becameblind or handicapped he would become free.[14] According to Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq(peace be upon him), if a slave is Muslim and has worked for seven years then heshould be set free. Forcing him to work after seven years is not permissible.[15] It is because of this tradition (hadith) that the religious scholars are of the opinion that freeing the slave after seven years is a highly recommended deed of virtue.

In addition to these compulsory ways of emancipation, voluntary emancipation ofslaves was declared as the purest form of charity. Imam 'Ali emancipated one thousand slaves, purchasing them from his own money.[16] The same was the numberof the slaves emancipated by the seventh Imam Musa al-Kazim. The fourth Imam,'Ali bin al-Husayn, used to emancipate every slave in his household on the eve of 'Idd (the annual celebration of Muslims). It is important to note that in all the above cases,the freed slaves were provided with sufficient means to earn their livelihood respectably.

Islam is the first and the only religion which has prescribed liberation of slaves as avirtue and a condition of genuine faith in God. No religion other than Islam has everpreached and enjoined how best we can show

our love for fellow human beings inbondage. In chapter ninety of the Qur'an, liberating a slave has been prescribed as acardinal virtue of the faith:

Certainly We have created men [to dwell] in distress. What! Does he think that no onehas power over him? He shall say, "I have wasted much wealth" Does he think thatno one sees him? Have We not given him two eyes, a tongue and two lips, and Wepointed out to him the two conspicuous ways [of good and evil]? But he would notattempt the uphill road. What will make you comprehend what the uphill road is? It isthe setting free of a slave… .

It should be mentioned that the setting free of a slave has been highly commended.Islam controlled slavery in such a graceful and practical way that it made themaintaining of a slave a great responsibility for the master, and at the same time itenjoined so much care and kindness to thhe slaves that in many cases when the slaveswere set free they did not like to leave their masters.

Thirdly, Islam restored dignity to slaves and enhanced their social status. It made nodistinction between a slave or a free man, and all were treated with equality. It wasthis fact that always attracted slaves to Islam. It is painful to see that those who nevercease to be vociferous in their unjust criticism of Islam should take no notice of thisprinciple of equality, when even in this enlightened age there are countries where lawsare made discriminating against the vast majority of population, to keep them inpractical servitude.

Islam recognises no distinction of race or colour, black or white, citizens or soldiers,rulers or subjects; they are perfectly equal, not in theory only, but in practice. The firstmu'azzin (herald of the prayer call) of Islam, a devoted adherent of the Prophet and anesteemed disciple, was a Negro slave. The Qur'an lays down the measure ofsuperiority in verse thirteen of chapter forty-nine. It is addressed to mankind, thewhole human race, and preaches the natural brotherhood of man without distinction oftribe, clan, race or colour. It says:

O you men! We have created you of a male and a female, and then We made you (intodifferent) races and tribes so that you may know (and recognise) each other. Surelythe most honourable of you with Allah is the one who is most pious among you; surelyAllah is All-Knowing and Aware.

This verse makes clear the view point of Islam as regards human life on earth. It laysdown only one criterion of superiority or honour and that is piety, which means complete obedience to the will of God. It annihilates all man-made and artificialdistinctions of race and colour which we find all over the world even now. To explainthe qualities of piety, let us note what Allah says:

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West,righteousness is this that one should believe in Allah, the Last Day, the angels, theBook and the Prophets, and give away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin,the orphans, the needy, the wayfarer, the beggars and to those in bondage and keepup prayers, pay the poor-rate; and those who fulfil their promise and the patient onesin distress and affliction and in the time of war - these are they who are the truthfuland these are they who are pious. (The Qur'an 2:177)

This verse clearly shows that by itself there is no specific virtue in turning towardsany particular direction for prayer. (The unity of the Qiblah indicates the unity of faithwhich leads to spiritual unity and culminates in physical harmony.) The belief andpractice enjoined in the verse are the real virtues, and apart from being ordered byGod, they appeal to human reasoning. Please mark that "to give away wealth out oflove for God to… those in bondage" is one of them.

In a tradition from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, it is stated that when a person hits hisslave (male or female), without any legal justification, then the only way ofaccounting for that act is setting the slave free even if that act of hitting is within thelimits fixed by God. In another tradition, Zurarah asked the same Imam about theattitude of a master towards the slaves. The Imam answered that "an actunintentionally done by the slaves is not punishable but when they are persistentlyand intentionally disobeying the will of the master, then they can be punished." Itwould be of interest to know that a slave was given the right to sue his master. A third tradition from the same Imam says that a man possessing the following fourcharacteristics will be forgiven and will be placed highly in the values of realms ofheaven: (1) one who shelters an orphan and takes interest in the circumstances andproblems in which orphan is placed and is kind to him in a fatherly way, gives him thelove of parents; (2) one who is kind and helpful to the weak; (3) one who spends onhis parents and is kind, thoughtful and looking towards them; (4) and lastly, the onewho is not furious in his behaviour towards his servant or slave and

helps him in thework one has ordered, and refrains from ordering him such task which is beyond hiscapacity.

"Islam enjoined that a master should treat his slave as one of his family-members; hemust be given all the necessities of life, just like any other dependent. The Prophetused to eat together with his slaves and servants, and sit with them; he himself did noteat or dress better than them, nor did he discriminate against them in any way.

"The masters were obliged not to put them under hardship; slaves were not to betortured, abused or treated unjustly. They could marry among themselves (with theirmaster's permission) or with free men or women. They could appear as witnesses, andparticipate with free men in all affairs. Many of them were appointed as governors,commanders of army and administrators.

"In the eyes of Islam, a pious slave has precedence over an unpious free man."[17]

It is stated in reliable traditions from the Prophet that one should feed his slave whathe himself eats and should dress him with what he himself dresses. In his famoussermon in 'Arafat, on 9th Dhul-hijjah 9 AH, during his last pilgrimage, the Prophetsaid, "… and your slaves, see that you feed them such food as you eat yourselves anddress him with what you yourself dress. And if they commit a mistake which you are not inclined to forgive then sell them, for they are the servants of Allah and are not tobe tormented… ".[18]

To say that Islam treated slaves on the basis of equality would be an understatement.Because, in fact, for a number of offences, the punishment meted out to a slave washalf of the punishment meted out to others.[19]This was in contrast to the establishedpractice of every nation to punish slaves more severely than the free men. ProfessorDavis writes, "The criminal law was almost everywhere more severe for slaves thanfreemen."[20]

The Prophet of Islam always exhorted his followers to treat their slaves like familymembers. He and his household always treated their servants as such. A femaleservant in the employ of Fatimah, the Prophet's daughter, testifies that her mistresshad made it a rule to share

all household drudgery with her and insisted that theservant should have rest every alternative days when she, Fatimah, would attend tothe work. Thus, there was equal division of work between the mistress of the houseand the maid-servant.

It is also recorded that once 'Ali and his male servant Qambar went to a shop where'Ali selected two garments, one a cheap coarse dress, the other expensive. He gave theexpensive garment to Qambar. Qambar was shocked. "Oh Master!", he said, "This isthe better one and you are the ruler of the Muslims. You should take this one." 'Alireplied, "No, Qambar, you are young and young man should wear better clothes."Could such a treatment produce any sense of inferiority in slaves? Masters wereforbidden to exact more work than was just and proper. They were ordered never toaddress their male or female slaves by the degrading appellation, but by the moreaffectionate name of "my young man', or "my young maid"; it was also enjoined thatall slaves should be dressed, clothed and fed exactly as their masters and mistresses did. It was also ordered that in no case should the mother be separated from her child,nor brother from brother, nor father from son, nor husband from wife, nor one relativefrom another.

Let us now refer to the Qur'an:

Worship Allah (alone) and associate nothing with Him, and do good to parents, tokinsfolk, to orphans, to the needy, to the neighbour who is a relative, to the neighbourwho is a stranger, to a companion by your side, to the wayfarer and to (the slave)which your right hands possess; verily Allah loves not the proud, the boastful. (4:36)

The Holy Prophet gifted a slave to Abu Dharr al-Ghifari and told him to maintain himin the best way, to feed him whatever he himself ate, to clothe him with whateverclothes he liked for himself. Abu Dharr had a robe which he immediately tore intotwo, and gave one piece to the slave. The Prophet said, "Excellent!" Abu Dharr tookthe slave home and liberated him. The Prophet was highly pleased with Abu Dharrand said, "God will reward you for it.

"How Imam Zaynul 'Abidin, the fourth Imam, treated his slave-girl is well-known inIslamic history. Once while serving food to the Imam, she accidentally dropped abowl of hot soup on him. She was deeply conscious of the injury and pain she hadcaused to the Imam. She knew very

well the disposition of the holy Imam and beganreciting the Qur'anic verse, "Those who restrain their anger."

"I have restrained my anger," the Imam replied.
"And those who forgive the people," she went on.
"I have forgiven you," he said.Lastly, she said,"And God loves those who do good to others.

"The Imam replied,"I set you free to seek the pleasure of God."

The slave-girl had quoted those words from verse 133 of chapter 3 of the Qur'an. Wereproduce the full verse here:

Those who spend (in alms) alike in prosperity and straitness, and who restrain (their)anger, and those who forgive the people, and Allah loves those who do good (to others).

Once someone remarked that the slaves of Imam Zayn al-'Abidin say to each otherthat they were not in the least afraid of him. On hearing this, the Imam prostrated toGod in thanks-giving and exclaimed, "I thank God that his creatures are not afraid ofme.

"From what we have said above it must be clear how kindly and lovingly the slaveswere treated by the Holy Prophet and the Imams of Ahlul Bayt, and those whofollowed the injunctions of the Qur'an and the examples set by the Prophet and theImams.

On the attitude of Muslim master with his slaves, Will Durant says, "… he handledthem with a genial humanity that made their lot no worse - perhaps better, as moresecure - than that of a factory worker in nineteenth-century Europe."[21]

At the end of the 18th century, Mouradgea d'Ohsson (a main source of information forthe Western writers on the Ottoman empire) declared:

"There is perhaps no nation where the captives, the slaves, the very toilers in thegalleys are better provided for or treated with more kindness than among theMuhammedans."[22]

P. L Riviere writes:

"A master was enjoined to make his slave share the bounties he received from God. Itmust be recognised that, in this respect, the Islamic

teaching acknowledged such arespect for human personality and showed a sense of equality which is searched for invain in ancient civilization"[23]

And not only in ancient civilisations; even in the modern Christian civilisation theingrained belief of racial supremacy is still manifesting itself every day. A. J. Toynbeesays in Civilization on Trial:

"The extinction of race consciousness as between Muslims is one of the outstandingachievements of Islam, and in the contemporary world there is, as it happens, a cryingneed for the propagation of this Islamic virtue… " Then he comments that "in thisperilous matter of race feeling it can hardly be denied that (the triumph of Englishspeaking peoples) has been a misfortune."[24]

Napoleon Bonaparte is recorded as saying about the condition of slaves in Muslimcountries:

"The slave inherits his master's property and marries his daughter. The majority of thePashas had been slaves. Many of the grand viziers, all the Mamelukes, Ali BenMourad Beg, had been slaves. They began their lives by performing the most menialservices in the houses of their masters and were subsequently raised in status for theirmerit or by favour. In the West, on the contrary, the slave has always been below theposition of the domestic servants; he occupies the lowest rug. The Romansemancipated their slaves, but the emancipated were never considered as equal to thefree-born. The ideas of the East and West are so different that it took a long time tomake the Egyptians understand that all the army was not composed of slavesbelonging to the Sultan al-Kabir."[25]

Notes:

[1]. Toynbee, A. J., Mankind and Mother Earth, (N.Y.: Oxford University Press,1976), p.12.

[2]. Ameer Ali, Muhammadan Law, vol.2, p.31.

[3]. al-Tabataba'i, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn, al-Mizan fi Tafsir'l Qur'an, vol.16, 2nded. (Beirut, 1390/1971), pp. 338-358.

[4]. al-Waqidi, Muhammad bin 'Umar, Kitabul Maghazi, ed. M. Jones, vol. I (London:Oxford University Press, 1966), p.129; Ibn Sa'd, al-Tabaqatul Kabir, Vol. II:1(Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1912), pp.11, 14.

[5]. Ameer Ali, Muhammadan Law, vol. 2, pp. 31-2.

[6]. al-Khu'i, Sayyid Abu'l Qasim, Minhajus Salihin, 3rd ed., vol. II (Najaf, 1974), pp.328-331; also see the Qur'an, 4:92, 5:89, 58:3.

[7]. Ibid.

[8]. al-'Amili, Hurr, Wasa'ilu 'sh-Shi'ah, vol.16 (Tehran, 1983), p.128.
[9]. Ibid.
[10]. al-'Amili, op. cit., vol.16, p.101.
[11]. Ibid, p. 111.
[12]. Ibid, pp. 121-2.
[13]. al-Hilli, Muhaqqiq, Sharaya'ul Islam, (kitabul-'itq); also see The Encyclopaediaof Islam:, vol. I (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), p. 31.
[14]. Ibid, pp. 31-3.
[15]. Ibid, pp. 43-4.
[16]. Ibid, p. 3.
[17]. al-Tabataba'i, op. cit., vol.16, pp. 338-358.
[18]. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. II:1, p. 133; al-'Amili, op. cit., vol.16, 21.
[19]. al-Amili, op. cit., vol.18, pp. 401f, 527-8, 586-7; vol. 19, pp. 73, 154f.
[20]. Davis, D.B., The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture (N.Y.: 1969), p. 60.
[21]. Hurgronje C., Mohammedanism, (N.Y., 1916), p. 128 as quoted by W. Durant,The Story of Civilization, vol. IV (N.Y., 1950), p. 209.
[22]. As quoted in The Encyclopaedia of Islam, vol.I, p. 35.
[23]. Riviere P.L., Revue Bleaue (June 1939).
[24]. Toynbee, A.J., Civilization on Trial (New York, 1948), p. 205.
[25]. Cherfils, Bonaparte et l'Islam (Paris, 1914), p. (?).

Chapter 6

Slaves in the History of Islam

To give an idea of how Islam raised the status of slaves and treated them as human beings instead of brutes of burden (which was their common lot before Islam), the following tradition is of particular interest:

One day the Prophet was sitting with Salman, Bilal, 'Ammar, Suhayb, Khabbab [allex-slaves] and a group of poor Muslims, when some unbelievers passed from there.When they saw these "unimportant" people with the Prophet, they said, "Have youchosen these persons from among your people? Do you want us to follow them? Has Allah bestowed His favour on them, that they have believed, and not us? You should better remove them from you; if you do so, then perhaps we would follow you." TheProphet did not agree to their demand, and Allah sent the following verse in this respect:

And do not drive away those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening, they desire only His favour; neither are you answerable for any reckoning oftheirs, nor are they answerable for any reckoning of yours, so that you should drivethem away and thus be of the unjust. And thus do We try some of them by others sothat they say: "Are these they upon whom Allah has conferred benefit from amongus?" Does not Allah know the grateful? (And when those who believe in our signscome to you, say: "Peace be upon you, your Lord has ordained mercy on Himself")(6:52-54)

Salman, Bilal, 'Ammar and their companions say: "When Allah revealed these verses,the Prophet turned towards us, called us to come nearer to him, and said, 'Your lordhas ordained mercy on Himself.' Then we used to sit with him, and when he wanted tostand up (and go from there), he did so. Then Allah revealed:-

And withhold yourself with those who call on their Lord in the morning and eveningdesiring His goodwill, and let not your eyes pass from them.. (18:28)

"When this was revealed, the Prophet used to make us sit so near him that our thighsalmost touched his thighs; and he did not stand up before us. When we felt that thetime had come for him to stand, we took his leave; and then he stood up after we hadgone. And he used to say to us, 'I thank God who did not take me out of this worlduntil He ordered me to keep patience with a group of my ummah. I shall spend my lifewith you, and, after death, shall remain with you.'"[26]

I propose to give here a short list of some of the slaves who occupy the highestspiritual and temporal status in Islam and in the Muslim society, from the verybeginning of Islam.

1. Salman, the Persian

First and foremost, of course, is Salman al-Farsi (the Persian). He was the son of aZoroastrian priest in the province of Fars. From the very beginning, he was aspiring tofind and follow a religion free from the embellishes of human interpolations. This waslong before the advent of Islam. He was converted to Christianity, and served onedistinguished priest after another in quest of divine knowledge. After long lastinghardships and troubles, he attached himself to a monk in Antioch, who at the time of his death, advised him that the time was ripe for the emergence of the last Prophet inthe world. He told him to make his way towards Hijaz, the Arabian province whichhas Mecca and Medina in it. In the way, he was taken as a captive by a gang ofwarriors and was sold from one master to another, till he changed ten masters. Lastly,he was purchased by a Jewess in Medina. It is not possible to give the details of thetortures meted out to him during his long-lasting captivity. Still it seems that fate wasbringing him nearer to his goal, because it was in Medina that he met the HolyProphet of Islam. After some subtle tests Salman recognised in him the long-awaited"that Prophet" of the New Testament (John 1:19-25). He accepted Islam.[27] TheHoly Prophet of Islam purchased him from his Jewess mistress and set him free. Itwas after the battle of Badr, the first battle of Islam, and before the battle of Uhud.[28]

Salman's faith, knowledge, piety and his unparalleled spiritual achievements put himabove all the companions of the Holy Prophet. He is one of the four pillars of trueMuslim faith (together with Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, Miqdad and 'Ammar). He has theunique distinction of being included in the Ahlul Bayt (the family of the Prophet) byvirtue of his faith and piety. The traditions showing his superiority and virtues cannotbe narrated in this short booklet. Nevertheless, I am quoting some of them to give thereaders a glimpse of his status in the eyes of the Prophet and his successors.

Though he had already accepted Islam, Salman did not participate in the battle ofBadr because of his captivity at that time. After Badr, he took active part in all thebattles fought to defend Islam and the Muslims. When the Qurayshites of Meccatogether with many other tribes including the Jews of Medina, besieged Medina, itwas Salman who advised the

Prophet to dig a moat around Medina in order to preventthe enemy from attacking the weak points of the city. And it is for this reason that this-battle is called the "Battle of Moat (khandaq)".[29]

It was at this battle that a friendly argument began between the emigrants of Mecca(the muhajirun) and the natives of Medina (the ansar). The subject: Was Salman amuhajir or an ansar? The ansar claimed that as Salman came to the Prophet inMedina, he belonged to the ansar group; the muhajirun claimed that as Salman hadleft his home and family, he was a muhajir.This friendly dispute also shows how great had become the status of Salman within ashort period of three years that every group wanted to claim him as their own.Anyhow, the dispute was referred to the highest authority - the Prophet, who decidedthat Salman was from neither of the two groups; he said' "Salman minna Ahl al-Bayt-Salman is from us, the family [of the Prophet]."[30] It was such a great honour whichhas continuously been mentioned in traditions and poems. A poet says:-

The devotion of Salman was his pedigree,while there was no relationship between Noah and his son.

The Holy Prophet had also said, "Salman is a sea which cannot be exhausted and atreasure which never comes to end. Salman is from us, the family [of the Prophet]; hehas been given wisdom, and is bestowed with reason."[31] Imam 'Ali said, "Salmanwas like Luqman, the Sage."[32] Luqman is thought by many Muslim scholars to be aprophet. Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq said that he was even better than Luqman.[33] ImamMuhammad al-Baqir said that Salman was from the mutawassimin (those who know the inner character of the people).[34] Numerous traditions say that Salman knew alismul a'zam (the greatest name of Allah);[35] and that he was from the muhaddathin(those to whom the angels talk).[36]

To show the greatness of Salman, it is enough that the Prophet said, "Faith has tengrades, and Salman is on the tenth (i.e., highest) grade, Abu Dharr on the ninth, andMiqdad on the eighth grade." Whenever Gabriel came to the Prophet, he used torequest him to convey the greetings of Allah to Salman, and to teach him theknowledge of the future.[37] Accordingly, Salman used to visit the Prophet at nights,where the Prophet and Amirul mu'minin 'Ali taught him from the secret knowledge ofAllah

which was never taught to any other person because nobody could bear it. Itwas because of this that Imam 'Ali said, "Salman got the knowledge of the first andthe knowledge of the last ones; he is a sea which is never exhausted and he is from us- the family of the Prophet."[38]

'Allamah Majlisi writes in 'Aynu'l-Hayat that it is understood from the traditions ofShi'ah and Sunnis both that after the ma'sumin nobody among the companions of theProphet was equal to Salman, Abu Dharr and Miqdad. Imam Musa al-Kazim said,"On the day of resurrection someone will call on behalf of Allah that 'Where are thehawariyyin and faithfuls of Muhammad bin 'Abdullah, who stayed firmly on the path-shown by him and never broke his convent?' Then will arise Salman, Miqdad and AbuDharr."[39]

The Holy Prophet said, "Allah has ordered me to love four of my companions."People asked who those four companions were. The Holy Prophet said, "'Ali bin AbiTalib, Salman, Miqdad and Abu Dharr."[40]According to traditions, Allah sent forSalman gifts and presents from Paradise; and the Paradise eagerly awaited hisarrival.[41]

Once Mansur bin Buzurg, himself of Persian origin, asked Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq as towhy he remembered Salman al-Farsi so much. The Imam said, "Do not say 'Salmanal-Farsi (the Persian)'. Say, 'Salman of Muhammad.' You should know that the reasonof my often remembering him are three of his special virtues: First, he discarded himown preferences in view of the preferences of Amirul mu'minin 'Ali. Second, he lovedpoor and preferred them against rich and wealthy persons. Third, he loved knowledgeand knowledgeable persons. Verily Salman was a good servant of God, a pure Muslimand he was not from the polytheists."[42]

Once some companions of the Prophet were describing their forefathers, showingpride in their family-trees. Salman was also among them. 'Umar, who later becomethe second caliph, turned towards him and asked him to describe his pedigree andfamily-tree. Salman said, "I am Salman, son of a servant of Allah. I was poor, andAllah made me rich through Muhammad (upon whom be peace); I was a slave, andAllah set me free through Muhammad (upon whom be peace). This is my pedigreeand my status, O 'Umar!"[43]

It has been stated earlier that Abu Dharr himself was one of the four pillars of faithand was on the ninth grade of faith (iman). But even Abu Dharr could not understandSalman properly.

Once he went to the house of Salman. Salman had put a cooking pot on fire. The twofriends were talking when all of a sudden the pot tumbled down and overturned. But,wonder of wonders, not a single drop fell out of the pot. Salman put the pot on the fireagain. After some time the same thing happened again. No drop was spilt out, andSalman nonchalantly put it right again.

Abu Dharr was flabbergasted. At once he came out and met Imam 'Ali in the way. Henarrated to him what he had seen. 'Ali said, "O Abu Dharr, if Salman informs you ofall the things that he knows, you will wonder.O Abu Dharr, Salman is a gate towards Allah on the earth. Anybody who accepts him is a believer, anybody who rejects himis a kafir. Salman is from us - the family [of the Prophet]."[44]

I think these few authentic traditions are enough to show the highest status of Salmanin the eyes of Allah, in the eyes of the Prophet, Imam 'Ali and his successors.

Salman was appointed governor of Iran. He came to Mada'in, the capital at that time.The people of Mada'in, long accustomed to the splendour and glory of the imperial court of Iranian emperors, came out to welcome the governor designate. They were waiting for a pompous caravan. But no caravan or entourage ever came. Instead, anold man, carrying a few of his belongings on his shoulder was coming towards themon foot. They asked the new comer whether he had seen the entourage of their governor. The new comer said, "I am your governor." And that simple-hearted governor of Mada'in ruled with such knowledge, compassion, justice and firmness that within a short period whole Mada'in was in his hands. That conquest was madenot by police or army, but by the power of his spiritual perfection, piety and for bearance.

He died in 36 AH in Mada'in. Imam 'Ali came from Medina to Mada'in in half a dayby miracle just to perform the burial rites of his trusted companion and brother.[45] Itwas a unique distinction of Salman. His grave in Mada'in (in Iraq) is visited by hundreds of pilgrims every day. The

pilgrimage (ziyarat) prescribed for that visitshows his greatness in the eyes of Allah.

ii. Zayd bin Harithah

Zayd bin Harithah bin Sharahil al-Kalbi, an Arab boy, was abducted in his childhoodand sold as a slave. This happened before Islam. Hakim bin Hizam bin Khuwaylidpurchased him in the market of 'Ukaz, and presented him to his aunt, Khadijah bintKhuwaylid, who gave him to the Holy Prophet.[46]

Zayd's father was searching for him. After a long time he came to know that Zayd wasin Mecca. He came to Mecca and offered to pay ransom so that Zayd might be setfree. The Prophet said that if Zayd wanted to be united with his family, then there wasno need of any ransom. He was free to go. But Zayd declined to go with his father andpreferred to remain with Muhammad. Harithah, Zayd's father, was extremely grievedand said, "O son, do you prefer to remain a slave rather than a free man? And do youprefer to leave your own father and mother for Muhammad?" Zayd said, "What I haveseen of the life of Muhammad is compelling me that I should not leave him for anyperson". Such was the loving attitude of the Holy Prophet that it had captured thehearts of all those who came to know him. And it was this unique characteristic of his generosity which made almost the whole Arabia accept Islam within a short period oftwenty three years.

Anyhow, Harithah was shocked and announced in Ka'bah that from then on neither hewas father of Zayd nor Zayd was his son. It was then that Prophet Muhammadannounced in the hijr Isma'il (besides the Ka'bah) that "I declare that from now onZayd is my son." Harithah, hearing this, returned to his home but in a less gloomymood.[47]

Zayd bin Harithah was now called Zayd bin Muhammad. This continued till 5 AHwhen the following verse was revealed:

God had not made for any man two hearts in his (one) body; nor has He made yourwives whom you divorce by zihar your mothers; nor has He made your adopted sonsyour sons. Such is (only) your (manner of) speech by your mouths. But God tells youthe truth, and He shows the (right) way. Call them by (the names of) their fathers, thatis better in the sight of God. (33:4-5)

Then Zayd was again called Zayd bin Harithah.[48]

The Prophet had married Zayd to his cousin Zaynab bin Jahash, who was the daughterof his aunt, Umaymah.[49] When the couple started quarrelling and Zayd divorcedZaynab, the Prophet, on the command of Allah, married Zaynab himself. (She at thattime was more than fifty years old.[50] This fact alone is enough to clear away thethick cobweb of the malicious stories which the Prophet's enemies have wovenaround this holy marriage.)

Allah says in the Qur'an:

Then, when Zayd had dissolved (his marriage), He joined her in marriage to you inorder that there may be no difficulty for the believers in the matter of marriage withthe wives of their adopted sons when the latter had dissolved (their marriage) withthe necessary (formality) with them, and God's command must be fulfilled. (33:37)By these two marriages of Zaynab bin Jahash, two pagan taboos were abolished: Bythe first marriage, the idea of racial supremacy or the belief that being a slave or freedslave was a stigma on the dignity of the person was destroyed.[51]

When a cousin of the Prophet could be married to a freed slave who could frown infuture on marriage of slaves with free women? (See the Qur'an 2:221) And by the second marriage, the belief that an adopted son was a real son wasdestroyed. When the Prophet himself did marry the divorced wife of his adopted son,then how could it be claimed that an adopted son was a real son? Thus the custom ofArabia which recognised an adopted son as a real son was most effectivelyabolished.[52]

Zayd is the only person among the companions of the Prophet to be mentioned byname in the Qur'an. He was the third person to accept Islam after Khadijah bintKhuwaylid and 'Ali bin Abi Talib. Zayd was the commander of the Muslim army sentto fight against the Christian forces at Muta. After the martyrdom of Zayd, Ja'far, the cousin of the Prophet, took over the command and he also was martyred. The Prophetwas much grieved on these two deaths.[53]

Zayd had a son, Usamah, from his first wife, Umm Ayman. Usamah was 19 years oldwhen he was appointed the commander of the army which consisted of all the wellknown companions of the Prophet, including Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman. Whensome of the companions

frowned upon this appointments, the Prophet delivered alecture in which he said, "Zayd was better than you, and his son Usamah also is betterthan you all." Usamah was ordered by the Prophet to go with the army to avenge thedeath of his father at Muta.[54]

iii. 'Ammar bin Yasir

'Ammar bin Yasir was one of the most respected companions of the Prophet and thefaithful follower of Imam 'Ali. He was from those who were brutally tortured in thecause of Islam. He did two hijrahs - to Ethiopia[55] and Medina; he prayed towardstwo qiblahs - Baytul Maqdis and Ka'bah. He participated in all the battles of Islamright from the beginning,[56] and was martyred in the battle of Siffin on 9th Safar, 37AH.

'Ammar and his parents were amongst the first converts to Islam. His father Yasir wasfrom the tribe of Qahtan in Yemen. He, together with his two brothers, came to Meccain search of a lost brother. His brothers returned to their homeland; but Yasir stayed inMecca where he entered into a covenant with Abu Hudhayfah (from the tribe of BaniMakhzum), and married his slave-girl, Sumayyah bint Khayyat. Yasir and Sumayyahbegot two sons, 'Abdullah and 'Ammar, who according to the custom of Arabia, wereconsidered the slaves of Abu Hudhayfah.[57]

After their conversion to Islam, Abu Jahl, with the help of other pagans, startedtorturing the whole family mercilessly. Ironnails were put upon their naked bodies andthey were made to lie down on the burning sand of the desert. The heat of the sun andthe desert sand made the iron mails hot like fire; their skins got burned. This tortureused to continue till they became unconscious. Then the iron mails were removed andwater was poured on them.[58] The Prophet felt very sorry for the suffering family;but was unable to protect them. Still he used to go near them and give them courage toforbear the tyrannies of their tormentors. He gave them good tidings of Heaven andsaid, "Be patient, O family of Yasir, because your promised place is Heaven".[59]

Yasir and Sumayyah were brutally murdered by the pagans of the Quraysh, under theleadership of Abu Jahl. It is a great distinction of this distinguished family that all ofthem were martyred in the cause of Islam. Sumayyah was very pious and God-fearinglady; and she was the first woman martyr of Islam.When his parents were killed, 'Ammar pretended to denounce Islam, and thus savedhis life. Then he came to the Prophet bitterly weeping that he had to utter the words ofkufr so that he could slip away from the hands of the infidels. The Prophet told himnot

to worry, as he had not uttered those words with his heart. In this connection, thefollowing verse was revealed:-

He who disbelieves in God after his belief in Him - except he who is compelled (to doso] while his heart remains steadfast with the faith - and he who opened (his) heartfor disbelief on them shall be the wrath of Allah and they, shall have a grievouschastisement. (The Qur'an 16:106)[60].

When 'Ammar described the atrocities meted out to the blessed Sumayyah, theProphet said, "Patience, O Abu Yaqzan; O Allah, do not punish anyone from thefamily of Yasir with hell-fire.

"When the Prophet came to Medina, and the mosque of the Prophet was being built,'Ammar enthusiastically carried double load of the stones. At that time he startedreciting some lines of poetry, which reached to the ears of 'Uthman (who later becamethe third caliph), who thought that 'Ammar was taunting him. Overcome by thismisunderstanding, 'Uthman hit 'Ammar on the forehead; blood came gushing out andcovered his face. He complained to the Prophet, who himself cleansed and dressed thewound and said, "'Ammar is the skin between my eyes and nose." Then he said,"Well, O 'Ammar, you will be killed by a rebellious group; you will be calling them toHeaven, and they will be calling you to Hell.'[61]

'Ammar's importance and honour can also be understood from the following sayingsof the Prophet: "'Ammar is with the truth, and the truth is with 'Ammar wherever hemay be. 'Ammar is the skin between my eyes and nose; and he will be killed by arebellious group.'[62] The Prophet also said, "Ammar is filled with faith (iman) fromhead to feet".[63] There are numerous other traditions of the Prophet and the Imamsconcerning 'Ammar.

'Ammar was one of those faithful companions who always followed Imam 'Ali. In35th AH when 'Ammar, along with many others, protested against 'Uthman bin'Affan's (the third caliph) policy on the distribution of the public treasury, the lattergot him beaten so mercilessly that the lining of his abdomen was burst and he gothernia.[64] As his father, Yasir had been an ally of Banu Makhzum, so they took'Ammar (still unconscious) to their home and said that if 'Ammar died they wouldavenge him with 'Uthman.

As mentioned above, the Prophet had said that he would be killed by a rebelliousgroup; and so it happened. 'Ammar was killed in the 37th year AH by the army ofMu'awiyah bin Abi Sufyan. He was then 90 or 91 years old. On the day when he wasmartyred, he was fighting valiantly against the army of Mu'awiyah, when one Syrian,Abul Ghadiyah al-Muzani, fatally wounded him in the waist; his companions carriedhim to safety. He asked for water; someone gave him a cup of milk. He said, "Truewas the saying of the Prophet". People asked him to explain. He replied, "The Prophethad informed me that my last sustenance from this world would be milk." Then hedrank some milk and after that he died.[65]

Amirul mu'minin 'Ali was informed of this tragedy. He came immediately and put'Ammar's head on his lap and recited the following elegy for his faithful companion:

O death, which is to come to me anyhow,Better give me rest at once;Because thou host finished off all my friends,

I see that thou doth recognise all my beloned ones,as though someone is guiding thee to them specially.

Then reciting "verily we are of God and to God will we return," he said, "Anybodywho is not extremely grieved on the death of 'Ammar has no share in Islam. MayAllah have mercy on 'Ammar." Amirul mu'minin himself said prayer on him, andburied him by his own hands.[66]

'Ammar's martyrdom created a problem for Mu'awiyah because many people in hisarmy did remember the aforesaid saying of the Prophet, and they realised that'Ammar, by his death, had shown that Mu'awiyah and his army were rebellious andnot on the right path. To pacify the army, Mu'awiyah said that it was 'Ali who hadcaused the death of 'Ammar by bringing him to the battlefield. When Amirulmu'minin 'Ali was informed of this ruse of Mu'awiyah, he said, "Then it was theProphet himself who killed Hamzah by bringing him to the battlefield of Uhud!"[67]

iv. Miytham al-Tammar

Miytham al-Tammar (the date-seller), son of Yahya, was a slave purchased by Imam'Ali. But very few people knew that he was a slave because 'Ali emancipated him andhe became one of the closest friends of his ex-master. He is counted as one of hishawariyyun. It means "disciple" as in the twelve disciples of Jesus.

Imam 'Ali had taught him the secret knowledge of Allah, and gave him insight into future events. He knew the details of death, of sufferings of future, which some timeshe described and people laughed at him; but the later events always proved him right.

When 'Ali purchased him, he was called Salim. 'Ali told him that he had heard from the Prophet that "your father in Persia called you Miytham". Miytham was astonished to hear it as nobody in Arabia knew his original name. Then 'Ali told him to keep his original name; thus he became Miytham again, and adopted the agnomen, Abu Salim.[68]

Miytham was a very pious man. It is written that, "… he, may Allah have mercy uponhim, was one of those who were very pious, and his skin had dried upon his body[because of fasting and continuous prayers)."

Abu Khalid al-Tammar says that once on a Friday they were sailing in a boat in Euphrates, when water became very stormy. Miytham looked up and told them to putanchor and secure the boat as the storm was to become more violent. Then he said that Mu'awiyah had died just then. The people noted down the date, which after wardsproved correct.[69]

Shaykh Kashshi narrates that one day Miytham al-Tammar was passing by a group from the tribe of Asad, when Habib bin Muzahir came there. They stood talking toeach other. Habib said, "It is as though I am looking at an old man (whose head isbald and who has a big stomach, and sells dates and water-melons) that he has been captured and his enemies have crucified him because of his love for and devotion tothe family of the Prophet; then they have pierced his stomach." All the characteristics were those of Miytham.

Miytham replied that, "I too am looking at a man (whose face is reddish) who willcome to help the son of the Prophet and will be martyred and his head will be broughtto Kufah." He meant Habib bin Muzahir.

Then they went their separate ways. The people who heard this conversation said thatthey had not seen any one more liar than those two. Just then Rushayd al-Hujri (whoalso was amongst the closest friends of Imam 'Ali and was given the knowledge offuture events) came there and asked whether they had seen Habib and Miytham. Thepeople repeated the conversation derisively. Rushayd said, "May Allah have mercyupon Miytham! He forgot to tell that the man who would bring the head of that redfaced man' would get hundred dirham more than the others in reward." WhenRushayd went away, the people said that he was bigger liar than those two.[70]Shortly afterwards all the prophecies were fulfilled exactly: Miytham was crucified,Habib was martyred in Karbala, and the man who brought Habib's head to Kufah wasgiven hundred dirhams more.

Amirul mu'minin 'Ali had told Miytham that, "You will be captured after me and theywill crucify you, and will pierce you with a spear; on the third day blood will ooze outfrom your nose and mouth and your beard will become red with your own blood. Youshould wait for that hair-dye. They will crucify you at the door of 'Amr bin Huraythwith nine others; and your cross will be the shortest, but your honour in the presenceof Allah will be the highest. Come with me; I will show you the tree upon which youare to be crucified." Then he showed Miytham that tree.[71]

Another tradition says that 'Ali bin Abi Talib asked Miytham, "What will be yourposition when the bastard of Bani Umayyah [i.e., 'Ubaydullah bin Ziyad] will compelyou to curse me and to abuse me?" Miytham said, "By Allah, I will never do so." 'Alisaid, "By Allah, then they will kill and crucify you." Miytham said that he would bearthose tyrannies; and that such sufferings were nothing in the way of Allah. Then 'Aligave him the good tiding: "O Miytham you will be with me in the hereafter in mygrade."[72]

After the martyrdom of 'Ali, Miytham used to go and pray near the tree. He used tosay, "May Allah bless thee, O tree; 1 have been created for thee, and thou art growingfor me." Whenever he met 'Amr bin

Hurayth, he would say to him, "When I comeinto your neighbourhood, you should remember my right as a neighhour."[73]

In 60 AH Miytham went for 'umrah (the minor pilgrimage). In Medina, he visited thehouse of Umm Salamah, the Prophet's wife. When he introduced himself, UmmSalamah said, "By Allah, many were the times when I heard the Holy Prophetmentioning and recommending you to 'Ali bin Abi Talib in the heart of night".Miytham learnt that Imam Husayn had gone outside Medina to one of his gardens.Miytham was in hurry so he told Umm Salamah to convey his greetings to ImamHusayn and tell him that very soon "we will meet in the presence of Allah".

Umm Salamah told her maid to rub perfume onto the beard of Miytham. Rubbingperfume on the beard was a mark of high respect in Arabia. After that, Miytham said,"O Mother of the Faithfuls, you have put perfume on my beard; but very soon it willbe dyed in my blood in the love for and devotion to you, the Ahlul Bayt." UmmSalamah said that Imam Husayn remembered him very much. Miytham said, "I too always remember him; but I am in a hurry, and there is a fate waiting for me and himboth; and we both will reach it.

"On coming out he met 'Abdullah bin 'Abbas and told him to ask whatever he wantedto know from the interpretation of the Qur'an, as "I have read the Qur'an from Amirulmu'minin and I know both its revelation (tanzil) and interpretation (ta'wil)." Ibn'Abbas called for paper and ink-pot and started writing Miytham's dictation. That aman like 'Abdullah bin 'Abbas did not frown from writing his dictation shows the highrespect of Miytham in the learned circle of the Muslim community.[74]

Then Miytham said, "What will be your feeling, O Ibn 'Abbas, when you will see memartyred with nine others?" Hearing this Ibn 'Abbas started tearing the paper, sayingthat Miytham had become a sorcerer. Miytham said, "Do not tear that paper. If yousee that what I have said does not happen, then you will have plenty of time to tearthat paper.[75]

After the 'umrah, he returned to Kufah. During his absence, 'Ubaydullah bin Ziyadwas made governor of Kufah. One day he asked the mu'arrif (a local informer) of Kufah about Miytham. On being informed that Miytham has gone to 'umrah, he toldthe mu'arrif that if he

failed to produce Miytham he would be killed in his place. Sothe mu'arrif went to Qadisiyyah to wait for Miytham. On reaching Qadisiyyah,Miytham was captured and brought before Ibn Ziyad. The people told Ibn Ziyad that Miytham was the nearest of all to 'Ali bin Abi Talib. Ibn Ziyad was astonished: "Was'Ali trusting this 'ajami (a non-Arab) so much?" Then the following conversation tookplace: Ibn Ziyad: "Where is your protector?

" Miytham: "He is waiting for the tyrants, and you are one of them.

" Ibn Ziyad: "Do you dare to speak like this before me? Now there is only one way tosave your life: you must curse Abu Turab.

" Miytham: "I do not know who Abu Turab is.

" Ibn Ziyad: "Abuse and curse 'Ali bin Abi Talib."Miytham: "What will you do if I refuse?" Ibn Ziyad: "By Allah, I will kill you.

" Miytham: "My master [i.e., 'Ali] had informed me that you would kill and martyr me,together with nine others, at the door of 'Amr bin Hurayth.

" Ibn Ziyad: "I will not do so, thus proving your master a liar.

"Miytham: "My master did not say any lie. Whatever he said, he had heard it from theholy Prophet, who had heard it from Jibra'il, who had heard it from Allah. How,therefore, can you prove them wrong? Not only this, I even know how you will killme and where you will martyr me. And I know that I will be the first man in Islamwho will be reined in the mouth to prevent me from speaking and the first man whosetongue will be cut out".

Ibn Ziyad imprisoned Miytham and Mukhtar bin Abu 'Ubaydah al-Thaqafi. Miythaminformed Mukhtar that he would be freed from the prison and that he would avengethe blood of Imam Husayn and would kill this man (i.e., Ibn Ziyad). And it happenedthat when Mukhtar was taken out to be killed, a messenger came from Yazid with anorder to re-lease Mukhtar.

Then Miytham was taken out and crucified on a tree at the door of 'Amr bin Hurayth.Now 'Amr understood what Miytham meant by his request; and so, he ordered hismaid to burn incense at his cross and clean the earth beneath him.Miytham turned the cross into pulpit. He started narrating the traditions of the holyProphet extolling the virtues and superiority of the Ahlul Bayt, and also the traditionsconcerning the wickedness of Banu Umayyah and their being cursed in the Qur'an andhadith; and how they would be destroyed at last. Ibn Ziyad was informed of thisunfailing courage and self-sacrificing spirit of Miytham. He feared lest Miytham'slectures turn the masses against the Umayyads and humiliate them in the eyes of thepublic. So he ordered that a rein be put into Miytham's mouth to prevent him fromspeaking. After sometime, his tongue was cut off.

On the third day, some one wounded him with a spear saying, "I am wounding youthough I know that you always fasted during the day and stood the whole night inprayers." In the evening blood came oozing out from his nose and mouth, reddeninghis face and chest, and he left this world. He was martyred in the cause of Islam, tendays before the arrival of Imam Husayn in Karbala. It means that he died on 21st or22nd Dhu'l hijjah, 60 AH. At night seven date-sellers secretly took away his body andburied him on the bank of a canal and erased the signs of the grave.[76]

Later on when there was no danger, the grave was shown to the public. Now there is abig shrine upon it where the devotees go for pilgrimage.

One of the graces of Allah upon Miytham was that knowledge and piety remained inhis progeny, generation after generation. His sons, grandsons and great-grandsonswere among the respected companions of the Shi'ite Imams. Miytham had six sons:Muhammad, Shu'ayb, Salih, 'Ali, 'Imran and Hamzah. All of them were among thecompanions of the fourth, fifth and sixth Imams.

Among his grandsons, Isma'il, Ya'qub and Ibrahim (all sons of Shu'ayb) werecompanions of the fifth, sixth and seventh Imams. 'Ali bin Isma'il bin Shu'ayb binMiytham is counted among the most prominent theologians of Shi'ism. Hisdiscussions with his adversaries show his knowledge, intelligence and presence ofmind. Moreover, we find many

other names in the progeny of Miytham mentioned inthe books of traditions and biographies (rijal).

v. Bilal al-Habashi

Bilal al-Habashi (the Ethiopian) was the first mu'azzin of the Prophet. His father wascalled Riyah, and his mother Jumanah; his agnomen was Abu 'Abdillah and Abu'Umar. He was from those who accepted Islam in the very beginning. He participatedin the battles of Badr, Uhud, Khandaq and other battles.[77]

Bilal was at first a slave of Safwan bin Umayyah. During his slavery, he was torturedinhumanely because of his faith. He was made to lie down naked on the burning sandof the Arabian desert; a heavy stone was put on his chest which made breathingdifficult for him. And as if it was not enough, some heavily built persons used to jumpupon the stone, trying to crush him to death. Still the only sound heard from Bilal was"Ahad! Ahad! (One God! One God!).[78]

Seeing such barbarism meted out to Bilal, the Prophet was very much grieved. AbuBakr purchased and emancipated him. In the 2nd year AH when the adhan (the call tothe prayers) was prescribed, Bilal was given the honour to call adhan.[79] Later on,some people suggested that this honour should be given to someone else, becauseBilal could not pronounce the Arabic letter shin properly. The Prophet said, "The sinof Bilal is shin in the hearing of God." Allah does not see the physical manifestation;He appreciates the purity of heart.

Once Bilal came to the holy Prophet and recited some lines of poetry in his ownlanguage in the praise of the Prophet. The Prophet asked Hassan bin Thabit al-Ansarito translate it into Arabic. Hassan said:

When noble traits are described in our country,thou art pointed out as a model among us.

It is a well-known fact that the Prophet had an admirable sense of humour - althougheven in witticism, he never spoke but truth. Once an old lady of Medina asked him topray to Allah to give her a place in the Paradise. The Prophet said, "Old women wouldnot enter the Paradise." She went out crying. Bilal saw her and asked her why she wascrying. She narrated the whole episode.Bilal came with the lady to the Prophet, andsaid, "This woman is narrating such and such from you?" The

Prophet said, "Evenblack men would not enter the Paradise." Now Bilal too started crying. Then 'Abbas,the uncle of the Prophet reached there and learning of the episode, tried to intercedewith the Prophet, who told him that even old men would not enter the Paradise. Whenhe too joined the crying group, the Prophet told them to be cheerful because Al-lahwould create them young and with bright faces and then they would go intoParadise.[80]

Bilal was devoted to the Ahlul Bayt. Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq is recorded as having said,"May God bless Bilal! He loved us, the family of the Prophet, and was one of themost pious servants of Allah.

"It is written in Kamil Baha'i that Bilal did not say adhan or iqamah for Abu Bakr,[81]and did not pay allegiance to Abu Bakr as a caliph. Shaykh Abu Ja'far al-Tusi hasnarrated in lkhtiyar al-Rijal a report that Bilal re-fused to pay allegiance to Abu Bakr;and 'Umar caught hold of his dress made of hide and said, "Is this the reward of AbuBakr; he emancipated you and you are now refusing to pay allegiance to him?". Bilalsaid, "If Abu Bakr had emancipated me for the pleasure of Allah, then let him leaveme alone for Allah; and if he had emancipated me for his service, then I am ready torender him the services required. But I am not going to pay allegiance to a personwhom the Messenger of God had not appoin-ted as his caliph." 'Umar then dealtharshly with him and said, "You should not remain here among us." That is why afterthe Prophet's death, Bilal could not remain in Medina; and migrated to Syria.

Some of his poetry on this subject is as follows:By Allah! I did not turn towards Abu Bakr,If Allah had not protected me,hyena would have stood on my limbs.Allah has bestowed on me goodand honoured me,Surely there is vast good with Allah.You will not find me following an innovator,Because I am not an innovator, as they are.The author of Isti'ab writes, "When the Prophet died, Bilal wanted to go to Syria. AbuBakr told him to remain in his (personal) service. Bilal said, 'If you have emancipatedme for yourself, then make me a captive again; but if you had emancipated me forAllah, then let me go in the way of Allah.' Abu Bakr left him alone."[82]Bilal died in Damascus by plague in the year 18 AH or 20 AH, and was buried in BabSaghir.[83] His grave in Damascus is visited by thousands of devoted Muslims everyyear.

vi. Fizzah

Fizzah al-Nubiyyah (of Nuba, at present in Sudan) has also gained immortality for herdevotion to Islam and her love for the Ahlul Bayt. At first, she served Fatimah, thedaughter of the Prophet. It was arranged by the Prophet that one day Fatimah wouldattend to the domestic duties while Fizzah would rest, and the following day Fizzahshould work while Fatimah would rest.

After Fatimah's death, 'Ali married Fizzah to Abu Tha'labah al-Habashi. She bore hima son; and then Abu Tha'labah died. Later on Fizzah married Malik al-Ghatathani.One day Malik complained to 'Umar about Fizzah. 'Umar said, "A 'hair' from thefamily of Abu Talib is more learned than 'Adi."[84] ('Adi was 'Umar's tribe.)

Fizzah raised a family of her own; but her devotion to the Ahlul Bayt continued. She,on her own accord, accompanied Husayn to Karbala and shared the agonies andsufferings which the family of Imam Husayn had to endure.

Her knowledge of the holy book, the Qur'an, is renowned in the Muslim world. It isrecorded that at least for the last twenty years of her life, she never uttered a singleword except the Our' an, and always talked by reciting the verses of the Qur'an. Oneinteresting piece of conversation is given here to illustrate her unique erudition:

Abu'l Qasim al-Qushayri quotes a reliable person that once he was left behind fromhis caravan and was travelling alone. In the desert, he saw a woman and asked whoshe was. The woman recited the verse of the Qur'an: "And say 'salam', and soon shallthey know." (43:89) He realised his mistake and greeted her, and then asked, "Whatare you doing here?"

The woman: "And those whom God guides, there can be none to lead (them)astray."(39:37)

The man: "Are you a genie or a human-being?"

The woman: "O children of Adam! Wear your beautiful apparel at every time andplace of prayer."(7:31)

The man: "Where are you coming from?"

The woman: "They are being called from a place far distant. "(41:44)

The man: "Where are you going to?"

The woman: "Pilgrimage to the House (of God) is a duty men owe to God, those whocan afford the journey."(3:97)

The man: "Since how many days have you been separated from your caravan?"

The woman: "We created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in sixdays. "(50:38)

The man: "Do you want something to eat?"

The woman: "Nor did He give them bodies that ate no food"(21:8)

So he gave her some food. After that he told her to run quickly. She said, "On no souldoes God place a burden greater than it can bear."(2:286)

So he asked her to sit on the camel behind him. Came the answer: "If there were, inthe heavens and the earth, other gods besides God, there would have been chaos inboth" (2l:22). Hearing it, he came down from the camel and requested her to ride it.When she sat on it, she recited, "Glory be to Him who has subjected this to our use,for we could never have accomplished this by ourselves. "(43:13)

After sometime, they reached the caravan. He asked her if she had any relative of herin that caravan. She said, "O Dawud! We have indeed made you a vicegerent on earth;Muhammad is not but a prophet; O Yahya take hold of the book with might; O Musa,verily I am your Lord." (38:26, 3:144; 19:21; 20:11-12 respectively.)

He called these names, and saw four young men running towards him. Meanwhile heasked the woman what was their relationship with her. She recited, "Wealth and sonsare adornments of the life of this

world."(18:46). At that time her sons reached them;the mother told her sons, "O my father, engage him on wages, truly the best of menfor your to employ is the man who is strong and trustworthy."(28:26) The sons gavehim some remuneration for his trouble and service. But she thought it was notenough; so she said, " God gives manifold increase to whom He pleases."(2:261) Sothey increased some more. (These sons were most probably from Fizzah's secondhusband, Malik al-Ghatathani.)

That person asked the sons who she was. They informed him that she was Fizzah, theservant of Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet; and that since twenty years she hasnot spoken a signal word except the Qur'an.[85]

vii. Qambar

Qambar's name is often mentioned in the traditions. And he has been immortalised bythe poetry lines of Imam 'Ali:

When I saw an unlawful thing,1 kindled a fire and called Qambar.

Someone asked Qambar who was his master. Qambar described the virtues of Imam'Ali bin Abi Talib in such a lucid and impressive manner that it has been recorded bythe traditionists ad verbatim.[85] As justice cannot be done to it in translation, I amleaving that oration out. I have already said how lovingly Qambar was treated byImam 'Ali. After the Imam's death, Qambar used to relate that very seldom did hehave the occasion to serve his master because Imam 'Ali used to do his work by-himself: he used to wash his own clothes, even mended them himself wheneverneeded; he would draw water from the well for his daily use; would give them goodfood and decent dress but would himself eat and dress like a poor man. His oft-usedphrase with them was "go easy child".

Qambar used to say, "It was only once that he got annoyed with me. It was at the timewhen I showed him the money that I have 'hoarded.' It was from my share of theincome given to me by others and gifts I had received from the members of hisfamily. I had collected about hundred dirhams. When I showed him the amount, helooked angry, and what pained me most, he looked sad." Qambar inquired why he wasso sad. He replied, "Qambar, if you had no use of the money, were there no peoplearound you who needed the money? Some of them might have been starving, othersmight have been ill and infirm. Could you not have helped them? I never thought youcould be so heartless, and could love wealth for the sake of wealth. Qambar, I amafraid you are not trying to acquire much from Islam; try more seriously andsincerely. Take the coins out of my house." Qambar immediately distributed themoney amongst the poor and the needy. It might be added that Qambar had long beenfreed by Imam 'Ali, but he remained with him.

Hajjaj bin Yusuf al-Thaqafi, the governor of 'Abdul Malik bin Marwan in Iraq, was atyrant who used to boast that, "The most tasteful thing to me in the world is sheddingthe blood." His name has become a proverb

in tyranny. He killed 120,000 peoplewhose only crime was their love for and devotion to 'Ali bin Abi Talib and the AhlulBayt. This number does not include those who were killed by him in the battles. Hetried very hard to eliminate the Shi'ahs of 'Ali from Iraq. Sa'id bin Jubayr and Kumaylbin Ziyad were two of his victims.

Once Hajjaj asked, "Is there anybody left from the followers of Abu Turab [i.e., 'Ali]so that I may please Allah by killing him?" He was told that there was Qambar, hisslave.

So Qambar, then a very old man, was captured and brought to him. Then thefollowing talk took place between Hajjaj and Qambar:

Hajjaj: "Are you the slave of 'Ali?"

Qambar: "Allah is my Master and 'Ali is my benefactor.

"Hajjaj: "What was your duty in the service of 'Ali.

" Qambar: "I used to bring water for his ablution (wuzu).

" Hajjaj: "What was 'Ali reciting after finishing the wuzu ?

"Qambar: "He used to recite this verse: 'And when they forgot that which they had beenadmonished, He opened for them the door of all things (of enjoyment); until whenthey rejoiced in what they were given, We caught them suddenly, when, lo! they werein utter despair.'[6:44]

" Hajjaj: "I suppose he meant us to be included in this verse?"

Qambar: "Yes.

" Hajjaj: "You better leave the religion of 'Ali.

"Qambar: "Before I leave his religion, tell me which religion is better than his.

" Hajjaj: "What will you do if I cut your head?"

Qambar: "Then it will be good luck for me and bad luck for you." In another tradition, this last question and answer have been recorded differently:

Hajjaj: "I surely intend to kill you. You better choose your own method of death.

"Qambar: "It is up to you. Kill me in whatever way you like, because I kill you in thesame way on the day of judgement. And, as a matter of fact, my master had told methat you would behead me.

"Hajjaj ordered him to be beheaded. Qambar was martyred in the cause of his faith.Today his grave in Baghdad is the place of pilgrimage for thousands of pilgrims.[86]

viii. Sa'id

Sa'id, another slave of 'Ali bin Abi Talib, says that once on a very hot day, 'Ali wasvery busy writing letters. He wanted to send Sa'id to call some of his officers. Hecalled him once, twice and thrice, and each time Sa'id purposely kept silent and didnot reply. The Imam then got up himself and saw Sa'id sitting not very far. He askedhim why he did not respond to his call. Sa'id replied, "Sir, I wanted to find out whenand how you would get angry." A smile appeared on 'Ali's lips and he told Sa'id thathe could not rouse him to anger with those childish tricks. Imam 'Ali set him free, butcontinued to support him till his death

ix. Slaves: The Helpers Of The Faith

As the Prophet of Islam brought the message of universal brotherhood, it wasinevitable that this message of emancipation of the human soul should have attractedthe people of all races and creeds; but especially the oppressed groups. It was naturalthat the larger part of his early followers was made up of the slaves.

The reactionaries were horrified; in desperation, they began persecuting the newlyconverted Muslims. Apart from those whose descriptions have already been givenabove, the following names deserve particular attention:

Suhayb bin Sinan of Rome was a slave converted to Islam in its early days.[87]He was a skilled iron-smith, making fine coats of mail and swords. Thus, heaccumulated a good fortune. After his conversion to Islam, he was also brutallytortured by the infidels.[88] When he wanted to migrate to Medina, the infidelspounced upon him and took every single dirham from his possession. Thus he arrivedat Medina a destitute. He was entrusted by 'Umar, the second caliph, to lead people inprayers after his death till the next caliph was appointed.[89]

Khabbab bin al-Arratt was a famous companion of the Prophet. He was the sixthman to accept Islam. He was from the continent of Africa; and suffered for the causeof truth.[90] He was among those who were known as "Shi'ahs (partisans) of 'Ali."His son, 'Abdullah together with all his family-members, was martyred by theKharijites in 40 AH.[91]

The greatest sacrifice in the cause of Islam was offered in Karbala in 61 AH by ImamHusayn and his companions. A group of about 120 souls faced the host of Yazid binMu'awiyah's army (not less than 30,000 in number). It is noteworthy that in that Godloving, God-fearing group of 120 believers, about 16 were slaves or ex-slaves. Theywere as follows:

Shawdhab, an African martyr; was one of the most respected scholars of Islamiclaws and traditions. People used to travel from far to listen to his discourses.[92] Onhearing Husayn's plight, Shawdhab and his ex-master (and now companion) 'AbisShakiri joined him and fell on the battlefield of Karbala.

John bin Huwai, of Ethiopia, was probably a convert from Christianity as hisname suggests. He was a slave of Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, the famous companion of theProphet. After the death of Abu Dharr, he attached himself to the Ahlul Bayt whowere looking after him. He accompanied Imam Husayn to Karbala, and although bythis time an old man he tried to go to the battle-field to fight. Imam Husayn at firstrefused; but John persisted and, at last, the Imam allowed him to go to the battle-field.When he fell down, Imam Husayn went to his corpse, put his head on his lap, andasked God to illuminate the face of John. When people of the tribe of Asad came afterthree days to bury the martyrs, they were astonished to find a corpse which wasshining with heavenly light and enveloped in heavenly perfume. It was John's corpse.

Salim, Zahir bin 'Amr, Qarib bin 'Abdullah Du'ali, Munjih bin Sahm,Sa'd bin Harth, Nasr bin Abi Naizar, Aslam bin 'Amr and Sulayman were among the victims of the "first attack" - an attempt made by the cavalry of Yazidto wipe out the little group of Husayn by overwhelming them with a powerful, fastand surprise attack. The Yazidites failed in their attempt because of the superiority ofthe defence technique of the Husaynites and their fierce devotion to him. The cavalryof Yazid retreated, leaving behind a large number of dead. But this victory was wonby the followers of Imam Husayn with a heavy price. More than fifty companions ofHusayn were lying on the battle-field; among them were the six above-mentionedbrave slave martyrs. There were six other slaves who were martyred in Karbala. Theirnames are: Harth bin Nabhan, Sa'id, Nafi', Salim, Shabib and Wadih. Descriptionis also found in histories of a Turkish slave of Imam Zaynul 'Abidin who fought thearmy of Yazid and gave his life in the cause of Islam.[93]

'Aqabah bin Sam'an, also a slave, was one of the most trusted companions ofImam Husayn. The Imam left all his important documents in his custody. In modemterminology, way may say that he was a secretary of Imam Husayn. He was woundedin the battle of Karbala and taken prisoner along with Imam Husayn's family. Beingone of the eye-witnesses of the massacre of Karbala, 'Aqabah bin Sam'an's chronicleis a valuable source of history. Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, the famous Muslim historian, hasrecorded 'Aqabah's chronicle in his Ta'rikh al-umam wa al-muluk. That chronicle wasseparated from al-Tabari's Ta'rikh and published in

India with the notes by lateMujtaba Husayn Kamunpuri of Aligarh Muslim University.

Muslims have always been proud of the sacrifices offered by the martyrs of Karbalafor the cause of Islam. The descendants of Imam Husayn always offered theirsalutations to them, some times name by name, sometimes jointly. The Shi'ah Ithna'Asharis, following their Imams, always salute these martyrs in the following term,almost everyday:

-Salutation to you, O saints of Allah and His beloved ones;

Salutations to you, O chosen ones of Allah and His dear ones;

Salutations to you, O helpers of the Faith;

May my parents have the privilege of laying down their lives for you, Pure and cleanwere you, and pure and clean became the earth in which you were buried;you have indeed achieved the greatest success;

I wish to Allah that I were there with you to share the success.[94]

x. Slaves' Children: Imams and Caliphs

From its advent until the rise of the Umayyads, Islam had achieved a marked degreeof success in its benign war against slavery. Slaves were no longer sub-humananimals, but men and women of dignity and respect. Many a freed slave rose to highranks. The descendants of the Prophet and their followers continued the Islamicattitude towards slavery. A number of Imams married slave-women who becamemothers of Imams. The Kaysaniyyah sect believed Muhammad al-Hanafiyyah (a son of Imam 'Ali) to bethe Imam after Imam Husayn. Muhammad al-Hanafiyyah's mother Khawla bint Ja'far bin Qays was a captive whom 'Ali married. But nobody ever suggested that beingborn of a captive girl was a snag in the belief of the Kaysaniyyah.

Likewise, Zaydiyyah sect believes that the Imam, after Imam Zaynul 'Abidin, was hisson Zayd who was born of a Sindhi slave-girl, named Huriya.

Even Shahr Banu, daughter of Yazd Jurd (the last emperor of Iran) who was marriedto Imam Husayn and was mother of Imam Zaynul 'Abidin, had come to Arabia as acaptive. Still her personal virtues earned her the title of "chief of the ladies".

Hamidah Khatun, mother of Imam Musa al-Kazim was a slave-girl from Berber. Sheis renowned for her knowledge and piety. She was called Hamidah the Pure. Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq used to send the women to learn the tenets of religion from her andused to say that "Hamidah is pure from every impurity like the ingot of pure gold.

" The mother of Imam 'Ali al-Riza also was a slave-girl from Maghrib (North-WestAfrica). Her name was Taktum (or Najma) and she was known as Tahirah, the purifiedone. She was renowned for her piety and knowledge.

Imam Muhammad al-Taqi was son of Sabikah, commonly known as Khayzuran, aslave-girl from Nuba. Imam Musa al-Kazim had told Yazid bin Sabt to convey hissalams to Sabikah. She is referred to in the traditions as Tayyibah. Imam 'Ali al-Naqi's mother, Sammanah, of Maghrib, was a slave, but she was called"Sayyidah" (chief of the ladies). She had

no equal in piety, and love and fear of Allah.She fasted nearly the whole year.Imam 'Ali al-Naqi told her that she was protected byAllah and was foremost amongst the mothers of siddiqin and salihin - the truthful an-dvirtuous people.

Imam Hasan al-'Askari was also born of a slave-girl, Hudayth (or Salil). To show herhigh prestige among the Shi' ahs, it is enough to say that after the death of ImamHasan al-'Askari she was the central figure of Shi'ism around whom the wholecommunity gathered and she guided them in the best possible way. The Shi'ahsreferred to her as "Jaddah", the grandmother.

Narjis Khatun, the mother of our 12th and present Imam, was a princess of theByzantine empire. But she also had reached to Imam Hasan al-'Askari as a slave.

This much will suffice on the spiritual side. Coming to the politics, we see countlessslaves in highest responsible posts, including the command of armies, governorshipand judgeship. Not only in administration, we find theologians, commentators of theQur'an, traditionists, jurists and authors who either were slaves or the children of theslaves or ex-slaves. Except for the first, third, fourth and fifth caliphs, all the 'Abbasidcaliphs were born from slave women, the famous al-Mansur (the 2nd caliph) being thefirst of them whose mother, Salamah, was a slave from Berber. Then beginning fromMa'mun al-Rashid (the 6th caliph) up to the last all were sons of slave-girls.

Here are the names of those caliphs and of their slave mothers:-

1. Ma'mun al-Rashid: Murajil, a black slave-girl.
2. Mu'tasim Billah: a slave-girl from Kufah, named Maridah.
3. Wathiq Billah: a Roman named Qaratis.
4. Mutawakkil 'Allallah: son of Shuja.
5. Muntasir Billah: a Roman named Habashiyyah.
6. Musta'in Billah: Mukhariq.
7. Mu'tazz Billah: a Roman named Qabihah.
8. Muhtadi Billah: Wards, or Qurb.
9. Mu'tamid 'Alallah: a Roman named Fityan.
10. Mu'tazid Billah: Sawab (or Hirz or Dhirar).
11. Muktafi Billah: a Turkish slave-girl named Jijaq or Khudi.

12. Muqtadir Billah: a Roman or Turkish slave-girl called Gharib or Shaghab.
13. Qahir Billah: Fitnah.
14. Radhi Billah: a Roman, Zalum.
15. Muttaqi Lillah: Khalub or Zuhra.
16. Mustakfi Billah: Awjahun Naa or Ghusn.
17. Muti' Lillah: Mash'alah.
18. Atta'i Lillah: Hazar or Atab.
19. Qadir Billah: Dumanah or Tamanni.
20. Qa'im Billah: an Armenian called Badrudduja or Qatrunnada.
21. Muqtadi Bi Amrillah: Arjwan.
22. Mustazhir Billah: a slave (name not recorded).
23. Mustarshid Billah: a slave (name not recorded).
24. Rashid Billah: a slave (name not recorded).
25. Muqtafi Li Amrillah: an Ethiopian slave-girl.
26. Mustanjid Billah: a Karjiyya slave named Ta'us.
27. Mustadi' Bi Amrillah: an Armenian named Ghaddha.
28. Nasir Li Dinillah: a Turkish slave, Zamurrad.
29. Zahir Bi Amrillah~: Name not recorded.
30. Munstansir Billah: a Turkish slave (name not recorded).
31. Musta'sim Billah: Hajir.[95]

Even as late as the Ottoman Turkish Empire, the royal family may rightly be includedin the slave-family because the mothers of the Sultan's children were slaves. TheSultan himself was a son of a slave. Long before Sulayman's time, the Sultan hadpractically ceased either to obtain a bride of royal ranks or give title of wife to themothers of their children. The Ottoman system deliberately took slaves and madethem ministers of state. It took boys from the sheep-run and the plough tail and madethem courtiers and the husbands of princesses, it took young men of land whoseancestors had borne the christian names for centuries, and made them rulers in thegreatest of Muslim states.

Throughout the Muslim history, we find slaves rising not only to administrative postsbut to the kingship as well. In the words of Will Durant, "It is astonishing how manysons of slaves rose to high place in the intellectual and political world of Islam, howmany, like Mahmud and the early Mameluks, became kings."[96] Subuktagin ofGhazni and his son, Mahmud (the famous warrior king who attacked India seventeentimes), were slaves and son of slave respectively. The first Muslim

dynasty of Indiawas also found by slaves, and is still known as the slave dynasty.

Before closing this chapter, I must emphasise one point: All those slaves or childrenof slaves who reached the height of prestige spiritually or politically - did so neitherbecause of nor in spite of being slaves or children of slaves; they reached therebecause they were Muslims who had abilities. Their status of slavery or ex-slaveryneither enhanced nor decreased the chances of their success; it neither facilitated norhindered their pursuit to reach their goal of life. Muslim society, thanks to the strictinjunctions of Islam and Prophet Muhammad, was colour-blind and status-blind. The only thing that mattered was the ability which a man or woman had.

This achievement, effected 1400 years ago, is a far cry from the blatant failure ofChristianity in this 1960's where, in Christian U.S.A. if a Negro becomes a mayor it isconsidered a big news; and where in 1971 the Government planned to promote its firstblack admiral, a certain Captain Samual Lee Gravely.

You see the implication of this news. Someone from the Negroes is to be selected onpolitical grounds because he is a Negro. Had it been solely on his personal records,the name would not have been a matter of specu-lation! Such kind of racialism andsnobbery was, and still is, unthinkable in Islam. Thus, it is clear that Islam succeededwhere every other religion and system has failed so far. Islam absorbed the slaves inMuslim society without any regard of their colour or origin. Judging on its ownrecords, we cannot but admire the tremendous success of Islam in this field.

Notes:

[26]. al-Majlisi, M.B., Hayatul Qulub, vol. II (Tehran: Kitabfurushi-e Islamia, 1371AH), pp. 562-3; Abu Na'im Ahmad al-Isfahani, Hilyatul Awliya, vol. I (Beirut, 1967),pp. 146-7.

[27]. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. IV:1, p. 58.

[28]. al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar; vol. 22 (Tehran, n.d.), p. 355; Abu Na'im, op. cit.,vol. 1, pp. 193-5; Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, al-Isabah fi Tamyiz's-Sahabah, vol. 3(Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1853-88), p. 224.

[29]. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. II:1, p.47.

[30]. al-Majlisi, Bihar, vol. 20, pp. 189, 198; Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. IV:1, p. 59, vol.VII:2, p. 65.

[31]. al-Majlisi, Bihar; vol. 22, p. 348.

[32]. al-Majlisi, op. cit., vol. 22, pp. 330, 391; Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. IV:1, p. 61; AbuNa'im, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 187. [33]. al-Majlisi, op. cit., vol. 22, p. 331.

[34.] Ibid, p. 349.

[35]. Ibid, p. 346.

[36]. Ibid, p. 327, 349.

[37]. Ibid, p. 347.

[38]. Ibid, p. 319; Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. IV:1, p. 61; Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 187.

[39]. al-Majlisi, op. cit., vol. 22, p. 342.

[40]. Ibid, p. 321.

[41]. Ibid, p. 325; Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 190.

[42]. al-Majlisi, op. cit., vol. 22, p. 327.

[43]. Ibid, p. 381.

[44]. Ibid, p. 374.

[45]. Ibid, pp. 372, 380.

[46]. Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 45.

[47]. al-Majlisi, op. cit., vol. 22, pp. 314, 318; Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol.III:1, p. 28; IbnHajar, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 45-6.

[48]. al-Majlisi, op. cit.; Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III, p. 29; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 7, p.600.

[49]. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. 8, p. 31; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 46, vol. 7, p. 600.

[50]. al-Tabataba'i, al-Mizan, 3rd ed., vol. 4 (Beirut: 1974), p. 195.

[51]. al-'Amili, op. cit., vol. 14, p. 43; Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. VIII:1, p. 71.

[52]. al-Majlisi, op. cit., vol. 22, p. 187; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 7, p. 600.

[53]. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, p. 32; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 47.

[54]. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. II:2, pp. 41-2; vol. IV:1, pp.46-7.

[55]. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, p. 179; Ibn Athir, Usdu '1-Ghabah fi Ma'rifati'sSahabah, vol. 4 (Egypt, n.d.), p. 461; Ibn Kathir, al-Tar'ikh, vol. 7 (Egypt, n.d.), p.311.

[56]. Ibid.

[57]. Ibid, vol, III:1, p. 176.

[58]. Ibid, vol. III:1, p. 177; Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 140.

[59]. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, p. 178; Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol.1, p. 140; Ibn Hajar,op. cit., vol.3, p. 1219.

[60]. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, p. 178; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 1220.

[61]. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, pp. 177, 180; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 1220; alBukhari, al-Sahih, vol. 8 (Egypt ed.) pp. 185-186; al-Tirmidhi, al-Jami' al-Sahih, vol.5 (Egypt ed.) p. 669; Ahmad bin Hanbal, al-Musnad, vol. 2 (Egypt ed.) pp. 161, 164,206, vol. 3, pp. 5, 22, 28, 91, vol. 4, pp. 197, 199, vol. 5, pp. 215, 306, 307, vol. 6, pp.289, 300, 311, 315; Ibn 'Abdi '1-Barr, al-Isti'ab fi Ma'rifat'l-Ashab, vol. 3, p. 1140.

[62]. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, p. 187; Hakim, al-Mustadrak 'ala 's-Sahihayn, vol. 3(Hyderabad ed.) p. 392; Ibn Hisham, al-Sirah, vol.2 (Egypt ed., n.d.) p. 143; IbnKathir, al-Ta'rikh, vol. 7, pp. 268, 270.

[63]. Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 139; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 1219; Ibn Majah,al-Sunan, vol. 1 (Egypt ed. n.d.) p. 65; al-Haythami, Majma' al-Zawa'id, vol. 9 (Egypted. n.d.) p. 295; Ibn 'Abdu'1-Barr, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 1137.

[64]. al-Baladhuri, Ansabu'l Ashraf, vol. 5, pp. 48, 54, 88; Ibn Abi '1-Hadid, SharhNahj al-Balaghah, vol. 3, p. 47; Ibn Qutaybah, al-Imamah wa 's-Siyasah, vol. 1, pp.35-6; Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, al-'Iqdu 'l-Farid, vol. 4 (Egypt ed.) p. 307; Ibn Sa'd, op. cit.,vol. III:1, p. 185; al-Diyarbakri; Tarikhu'l-Khamis, vol. 2, p. 271.

[65]. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, pp. 184-5; Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol.1, p.141.

[66]. Qummi, 'Abbas, Muntaha'l-Amal, vol. 1 (Tehran: 1381 AH) p. 92.

[67]. al-Tabari, al-Ta'rikh, vol. 1, pp. 3316-3322; vol. 3, pp. 2314-2319; Ibn Athir, alKamil, vol. 3, pp. 308-312; Ibn Kathir, al-Ta'rikh, vol. 7, pp. 267-272.

[68]. al-Mufid, Kitab al-Irshad, trans. I.K.A. Howard (London: Muhammadi Trust)pp. 243-244; and al-Kashshi's Rijal as quoted by Qummi, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 157.

[69]. Qummi, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 157.

[70]. Kashshi, Rijal, as quoted by Qummi, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 143-4.

[71]. Qummi, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 157; al-Mufid, op. cit., p. 244.

[72]. Ibid.

[73]. Ibid.

[74]. Ibid.

[75]. Ibid.

[76]. Ibid, pp. 158-9.

[77]. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III: 1, p. 170; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 336.

[78]. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, p. 166; Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 148; Ibn Hajar,op. cit., vol. 1, p. 336.

[79]. Ibid, p. 167.
[80]. al-Majlisi, Hayatu'l Qulub, pp. 129-130; Bihar, vol. 16, p. 295.
[81]. Shustari, Nurullah, Majalisu'1-Mu'minin (Tehran, 1268 AH) p. 54; and also seeIbn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, p. 169.
[82]. Shushtari, op. cit.; also see Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 150.
[83]. Shushtari, op. cit., p. 54; and also see Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, p.170; IbnHajar, op. cit., vol.1, pp.336-337.
[84]. Shubbar, S. 'Abdullah, Masabihul Anwar, vol. 2 (Najaf: Matba'ah al-'Ilmiyyah,1952/1371) p. 425-6 quoting Manaqib of Ibn Shahr Ashub.
[85]. Majlisi, Bihar, vol. 43 (Beirut, 1983/1403) p. 86-7; Ibn Shahr Ashub, ManaqibAal Abi Talib, vol. 4 (Bombay, 1313 AH) p. 15.
[86]. Kashshi, Rijal as quoted by Qummi, op. cit., vol.1, p. 153.
[87]. Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 153; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 514.
[88]. Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 514.
[89]. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, pp. 161-4; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 516.
[90]. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, p. 116-7; Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 144.
[91]. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, p. 21; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 739.
[92]. Qummi, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 266.
[93]. For more information on Imam Husayn and Karbala, see Rizvi, S.M., ed., ImamHusayn, the Saviour of Islam, (Vancouver: 1984).
[94]. Qummi, Mafatihu'l-Jinan (Tehran, n.d.) p. 427.
[95]. See relevant chapters of Muhammad Khawind Shah's Rawdatu 's-Safa; also Ibn'Abd Rabbih al-Undulusi, al-'Iqdu'l-Farid, vol. 5 (Beirut: 1983) pp. 113-131.
[96]. Durant, W., The Story of Civilization, vol. 4, p. 209.

Chapter 7

The Origin of Negro Slavery

Now that we have seen the attitude of Islam towards slavery, let us have a look a tChristianity and its followers, and see what they did in this respect.

It is surprising to see that Christians, who for the reasons of their own, now-a-dayspose themselves as champions of human freedom, were the most outspoken advocatesof the system of slavery. They invented philosophical and moral justifications forenslaving the "uncivilised" people. One of their arguments was they were saving themfrom their cannibal neighbours in this world, and from eternal disgrace in the lifehereafter.

Islam and its followers never thought on these lines. The vast multitude of Islamic literature is empty from this kind of pathetic effort at moralisation. But the Christian writers always mention slave-trade as though they had nothing to do with it and that itwas Islam which "encouraged and legalised slavery" while they, the Christians, hadalways tried to abolish this nefarious system!

It is interesting to note that when speaking about the West African totally Christianslave-trade, the Christian writers and historians call it "West African slave-trade" or"Atlantic slave-trade"; but when they turn to Eastern Africa, the term changes to"Arab slave-trade".

Christianity, by such false propaganda, has succeeded to a great extent in extending its influence among those Africans whom its propaganda machinery has kept bliss fully unaware of the fact that all Christian churches were active participants in African slave-trade. The following chapters will present the true picture for the readers.

"When in 1492 Columbus, representing the Spanish monarchy, discovered the New World, he sent in train the long and bitter international rivalry over colonial possessions for which, after four and a half centuries, no solution has yet been found.Portugal, which had initiated the movement of international expansion, claimed thenew territories on the ground that they fell within the scope of a papal bull of 1455authorising her to reduce to servitude all infidel people. The two powers, to avoid controversy, sought arbitration and, as Catholics, turned to the Pope - a natural andlogical step in an age when the universal claims of the Papacy were still unchallengedby individuals and governments. After carefully sifting the rival claims, the Popeissued in 1493, a series of papal bulls which established a line of demarcation between the colonial possessions of the two states: the East went to Portugal and theWest to Spain. The partitions, however; failed to satisfy the Portuguese aspirationsand in the subsequent year the contending parties reached a more satisfactory compromise in the Treaty of Tordesillas, which rectified the papal judgement topermit Portuguese ownership of Brazil."[1]

But this arbitration could not bind other powers aspiring to grab as many countries aspossible; England, France and even Holland began to claim their places in the sun.The Negro, too, "was to have his place, though he did not ask for it: it was the broilingsun of the sugar, tobacco and cotton plantations of the New World.

"According to Adam Smith, the prosperity of a new colony depends upon one simpleeconomic factor - 'plenty of good land.' The British colonial possession up to 1776,however, can broadly be divided into two types. The first is the self-sufficient and diversified economy of small farmers… The second type is the colony which has facilities for the production of staple articles on a large scale for an export market. Inthe first category fell the Northern colonies of the American mainland; in the second,the tobacco colonies and sugar islands of the Caribbean. In colonies of the latter type,as Merivale pointed out land and capital were both useless unless labour could becommanded. Labour, that is, must be constant and must work, or be made to work, inco-operation.. Without this compulsion, the labourer would otherwise exercise hisnatural inclination to work his own land and toil on his own account. The story is frequently told of the great English capitalist, Mr. Pell, who took 50,000 pounds and three hundred labourers with him to the Swan River colony in Australia. His plan wasthat his labourers would work for him, as in

the old country. Arrived in Australia,however, where land was plentiful - too plentiful - the labourers preferred to work forthemselves as small proprietors, rather than under the capitalist for wages. Australia was not England, and the capitalist was left without a servant to make his bed or fetchhim water."[2]

Thus the ideal solution was slavery.

"'Odious resource', though it might be, as Merivalle called it, slavery was an economicinstitution of the first importance. It had been the basis of Greek economy and hadbuilt up the Roman Empire. In modem times it provided the sugar for the tea and thecoffee cups of the Western world. It produced the cotton to serve as base for moderncapitalism. It made the American South and the Caribbean islands."[3]

"With the limited population of Europe in the sixteenth century, the free labourersnecessary to cultivate the staple cops of sugar, tobacco and cotton in the New Worldcould not have been supplied in quantities adequate to permit large-scale production.Slavery was necessary for this and to get slaves the Europeans turned first to the aborigines."[4]

"But Indian slavery never was extensive in the British dominions… In the case of theIndian … slavery was viewed as of an occasional nature, a preventive penalty and notas normal and permanent condition. In the New England colonies Indian slavery wasunprofitable, for slavery of any kind was un profitable because it was unsuited to thediversified agriculture of these colonies. In addition the Indian slave was inefficient.The Spaniards discovered that one Negro was worth four Indians. A prominent official in Hispanolia insisted in 1581 that 'permission be given to bring Negroes, arace robust for labour instead of natives so weak that they can only be employed in tasks requiring little endurance such as taking care of maize fields or farms… . The future staples of the New World, sugar and cotton, required strength which the Indianslacked, and demanded the robust 'cotton nigger' as sugar's need of strong mulesproduced in Louisiana the epithet 'sugar mules.' According to Lauber, 'when comparedwith sums paid for Negroes at the same time and place the prices of Indian slaves arefound to have been considerably lower.'

"The Indian reservoir, too, was limited, the African inexhaustible. Negroes therefore were stolen in Africa to work the lands stolen from the

Indians in America. The voyages of Prince Henry the Navigator complemented those of Columbus, WestAfrican history became the complement of West Indians."[5]

Notes:

[1]. Williams, Dr. Eric, Capitalism and Slavery (London, 1964) p. 4.
[2]. Ibid, pp. 4-5.
[3]. Ibid, p. 5.
[4]. Ibid, p. 6.
[5]. Ibid, pp. 8-9.

Chapter 8

Christians Organise Slave-Trade

Slaves were taken from Africa even during the Roman Empire, but the real "slavetrade" started in 16th century with the advent of the Christian European countries.

Edward A. Alpers of the University College of Dar-es-salaam, writes that "as we drawa distinction between the incidental trade in slaves which trickled across the Saharafrom West to North Africa as long as the days of the Roman Empire, on the one hand,and the phenomenon which we call the West African slave-trade, on the other hand, sowe must draw a similar distinction for East Africa."[6]

Walter Rodney also of University College, Dar-es-salaam, begins his booklet WestAfrica and the Atlantic Slave-Trade with the following words: "It must always beremembered that the Atlantic slave-trade was an event in world history, involvingthree continents - Europe, Africa and America. The people who set out to seek slaveswere Europeans coming from every country between Sweden in the north andPortugal in the south. The Portuguese arrived in West Africa shortly before the middleof the fifteenth century. Immediately, they started seizing the Africans and takingthem to work as slaves in Europe, particularly in Portugal and Spain. But the mostimportant developments took place in the sixteenth century, when Europeanscapitalists realised that they could make enormous profits by using the labour ofAfricans to exploit the wealth of the Americas. As a result, Africans were taken toNorth America, Central America, South America and the Caribbean to provide slavelabour in gold and silver mines and on agricultural plantations growing crops of sugar,cotton and tobacco. This notorious commerce in human beings lasted altogether formore than four hundred years, since the Atlantic slave-trade did not come to end untilthe late 1870's.

"Much can be said about the way that the Atlantic slave-trade was organised inEurope, and about the vast profits made by countries such as England and France. Alot can also be said about the terrible journey from Africa to America across theAtlantic ocean. Africans were packed like sardines on the slave-ships, andconsequently died in great numbers."[7]

And what a sardine! For details of these packing, read the following:

One of the most chilling of all the appalling documents is 'The Plan of the Brookes', anotorious eighteenth-century scheme for stacking slaves into the slave-ship'Brookes'… By a precise mathematical calculation, the technology of horror is laid out- feet and inches, standing room and breathing space assigned with lethal concern formaximum profit. A Mr. Jones recommends that 'five females be reckoned as fourmales, and three boys or girls as equal to two grown persons… every man slave is tohe allowed six feet by one foot four inches for room, every woman five feet ten byone foot four… ', and so it continues until every scrap of flesh is accommodated - 451in number. But an Act of Parliament allows for 454. So the document concludes that,'if three more could be wedged among the number represented in the plan, this planwould contain precisely the number which the act directs.'[8]

Once the Africans landed on the other side of the Atlantic, they were really in a "NewWorld", full of oppression and brutality. The following revelations may be helpful inunderstanding the situation prevailing at that time. Rodney writes:

"From the time of the arrival of the [Christian] Europeans until 1600, about one million Africans were carried away in slave-ships. During that period, the Portuguese were the chief slave-traders in West Africa. They either took Africans to Brazil, which they owned, or else they sold them to the Spanish settlers in Mexico, Central America,South America and the Caribbean Islands. In the seventeenth century, some seven to eight million West Africans found their way across the Atlantic. The Dutch joined the Portuguese as the leading slave-traders in the seventeenth century, and in the following century the British were the biggest slave-traders.

By the time that the Atlantic slave-trade was at its height in the eighteenth century, British ships werecarrying more than half of the total of slaves, leaving the rest to be divided upbetween the Dutch, the French, the Portuguese and the Danes. "By the nineteenth century, there was another change of the people who took the leading role in exploiting Africa. The European countries themselves were not as active in the slave-trade, but instead Europeans who had settled in Brazil, Cuba and North America were the ones who organised a large part of the trade.

The Americans had recently gained their independence from Britain, and it was the new nation of the United States of America which played the biggest part in the last fifty years of the Atlantic slave-trade, taking away slaves at a greater rate than ever before."When the Atlantic slave-trade began on the West African coast, it took the form of directed attacks by Europeans on Africans living near the shore. When the first Portuguese sailors reached the coast of what is Mauritania, they left their ships andhunted the Moors who lived in that region. In reality, this was not trade at all - it was violent aggression. However, after being surprised on a few occasions, the Africans onthe coast naturally kept watch for their European attackers and defended themselvesvigorously. Within a very short while, the Portuguese came to realise that raiding wasa very unsafe manner of trying to obtain slaves. Besides, they also wanted gold andother African commodities, which they could acquire only by trading peacefully. Soinstead of raiding, the Portuguese considered offering the manufactured goods inorder to encourage the Africans to exchange local products and to bring Africancaptive to the European ships. Not only the Portuguese, but all other Europeans found that from their point of view this was the best way to obtain goods in Africa; and it was in this way that they laid their hands on so many million Africans."[9]

Commenting on this aspect of the slave-trade the writer says that, "One of the mostimportant things is to recognise the very painful and unpleasant fact that there wereAfricans who aided and partnered the Europeans in enslaving other Africans. It means that we cannot take the simple attitude that the whites were the villains and blacks were the victims. A useful parallel which would help in the understanding of whattook place in West Africa during the centuries of slave-trading can be found in Africatoday, where many leaders join with the European and American imperialists to exploit the great majority of the African people. "In the long run, West Africans were reduced to the state of 'sell or be

sold'. Here thequestion of firearms was particularly important. To be strong, a state needed firearms,but to get firearms from the Europeans, the Africans had to offer slaves. African rulers found themselves selling slaves to get guns to catch slaves to buy more guns. This canbe described as a 'vicious circle'. It does not entirely excuse the African rulers who helped the Europeans, but it explains how in the end they were not so much thepartners of the Europeans but rather their servants or lackeys."[10]

And what was the church doing all that time? Hear the same author commenting:"Because there was so much profit to be made by taking slaves from Africa,Europeans refused to listen to their consciences. They knew about the suffering thatwas inflicted upon people in Africa, on the slave-ships and on the slave-plantations ofthe Americas, and they were aware that to sell their fellow human beings could not bemorally justified. Yet the Christian church came forward with excuses for the slavetrade. Many priests themselves carried on slave-trading, especially in Angola, andmany others owned slaves in the Americas. The only reason the Catholic Churchcould give for its actions was that it was trying to save African souls by baptising theslaves. The Protestants were worse, for they did not even make it clear that theyaccepted that the Africans had a soul. Instead, they supported the view that Africanslave was a piece of property like furniture or a domestic animal. There is no part ofthe history of the Christian church which was more disgraceful than its support of theAtlantic slave-trade. "[11]

According to the Lloyd's List, slaves were most decidedly considered to be a cargo,and very precious. Policies taken out at Lloyd's insured slaves for as much as 45pounds each - a considerable sum in early 18th century England.

To prevent them escaping, or to punish them, extraordinary devices such as shownhere were used both in West Africa and the West Indies.[12]

There were always a few individuals who protested against the Atlantic slave-traderight from the beginning; but governments and traders paid no attention to themduring the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was not until the lateeighteenth century that serious attempts were made to put a stop to this trade.

James Boswell, trying to refute the arguments of abolitionists, writes in his Life ofJohnson that, "The wild and dangerous attempt which has for some time beenpersisted in order to obtain an act of our legislature, to abolish so very important andnecessary branch of commercial interest, must have been crused at once, had not theinsignificance of the zealots who vainly took the lead in it, made the vast body ofPlanters, Merchants, and others, whose immense properties are involved in that trade,reasonably enough suppose that there could be no danger. The encouragement whichthe attempt has received excites my wonder and indignation; and though some men ofsuperior abilities have supported it, whether from a love of temporary popularity,when prosperous; or a love of general mischief, when desperate, my opinion isunshaken. To abolish a status which in all ages GOD has sanctioned, and man hascontinued, would not only be robbery to an innumerable class of our fellow-subjects;but it would be extreme cruelty to the African Savages, a portion of whom it savesfrom massacre, or intolerable bondage in their own country, and introduces into amuch happier state of life; especially now when their passage to the West Indies and their treatment there is humanely regulated. To abolish that trade would be to shut the gates of mercy on mankind."[13] The humanely regulated treatment and mercy shows itself in the details and diagrams given above!

Notes:

[6]. Alpers, Edward A., East African Slave-Trade (Dar-es-salaam: The Historical Association of Tanzania, 1967), p. (?)

[7]. Rodney, Walter., West African and the Atlantic Slave-Trade (Dar-es-salaam: TheHistorical Association of Tanzania, 1967) p. (?)

[8]. Newsweek (March 15, 1965) p. 106.

[9]. Rodney, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

[10]. Ibid, p. 7f.

[11]. Ibid, p. 22.

[12]. Lloyd's List, 250th Anniversary Special (1734-1984), April 17, 1984, London,p.149.

[13]. Boswell, J., Life of Johnson (N.Y.: Modern Library Edition, 1965) p. 365.

East African Slave-Trade

Like West Africa, the slave-trade in East Africa became prominent and was firmly established with the advance and endeavour of the Christian Europe.

Mr. E.A. Alpers writes in African Slave-Trade: "Further evidence that the slave tradewas by no means prominent in East Africa before the eighteenth century comes fromthe Portuguese. Surely the Portuguese, as the pioneers of the Atlantic slave-trade,would have tried to exploit the slave-trade in East Africa had they found it to be already flourishing. But the early Portuguese chroniclers only mention the slave-tradein passing. Much more important were the gold and ivory traders to Arabia and India.It is to these products that the Portuguese invaders turned their attention throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, not only along the coast of Kenya and Tanzania, but also Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Even wax and ambergris seem tohave been more important than slaves during most of this period. For unlike thecolonialist in the Americas, the Portuguese never developed any sort of plantationeconomy in India. The Portuguese slave-trade from Mozambique to India rarelyreached as many as one thousand individuals in any one year, and was usually lessthan half that number. That to Brazil was illegal until 1645 and was never seriously pursued until the beginning of the nineteenth century. As late as 1753, when the foundations of the new slave-trade in East Africa were being laid, there was grand total of only 4,399 African slaves in the whole of Portuguese India.

"What were these foundations? Despite the long Arab contact with East Africa, andtheir

[page 123 in original publication missing] could to encourage the slave-trade with the French.

According to official figures,more than 1,000 slaves were being exported each year. French, smuggling to avoid the taxes which were levied at Mozambique, probably raised the annual figure to at least1,500. A similar figure was probably taken away from Ibo during this decade.Hence forth the Portuguese at Mozambique and Ibo (and later at Quelimane, near the mouth of the Zambezi River) were committed to a policy of slaving from which therewas no turning back until abolition.

"The trade became much brisker in the eighties, especially after the conclusion of theAmerican war of independence. During the seventies a few adventurous Frenchslavers had taken cargoes from Mozambique to the West Indies, because they werefinding it increasingly unprofitable to seek their chattels along the Guinea coast. Now,in peacetime, with greater competition for slaves in West Africa, the way was openedfor a massive expansion of the American slave trade from East Africa. At the sametime Portuguese vessels also began to take an active, though still secondary, part inthe trade to the Mascarene Island. Official figures from Mozambique alone show thatfrom 1781 through 1794 a total of 46,461 slaves were embarked on Portuguese andforeign ships, nearly all of which were French. Allowing for a minimum amount ofsmuggling, at least 4,000 slaves annually must have been leaving the Mozambiquearea during this period."[14]

It was this juncture that Arabs extended a helping hand to these Christian Slavetraders. The same author says, "After the Omani Arabs had responded to the call ofsome of the Swahili rulers of the coastal towns and with their help had in 1698 evictedthe Portuguese from Mombassa and other outposts, they were themselves too weak todo more than disturb and rob the very people who had sought their aid… But after the Busaid family overthrew the Yorubi and established their rule in Oman in about 1744,they were able to begin effective economic exploitation of the people of East Africa.Like all previous merchants on the coast they were primarily interested in ivory, butfrom this point we can also detect a steady increase in the slave-trade.

"There are not, however, any accurate statistics on the volume of the Arab slave tradein the eighteenth century. The first indication which exists come from a French slavernamed Jean-Vincent Morice, who traded at both Zanzibar and Kilwa, which was themost important slave port on

the coast, in the 1770's. On the 14th September, 1776,Morice made a treaty with Sultan of Kilwa for the annual purchase of at the least1,000 slaves. In three trips to Zanzibar and Kilwa before signing this treaty, he hadbought 2,325 slaves for export. Morice does not tell us how many slaves the Arabs were taking away from the coast each year, but he clearly considered it to be a bigbusiness by French standards. It seems reasonable to suggest that at least 2,000 slavesa year were involved in the Arab trade at this time. So although the French did not dominate the slave-trade here as they did at Mozambique, they acted as an important stimulus to the demand of slaves at a period when the Arab trade was still out growing its infancy. French efforts continued through the 1780's, but by the end of thecentury these probably had become much less important than the Arab trade.

"Several new factors gave rise to the increased demand for slaves from East Africaduring the nineteenth century. In the Portuguese coastal sphere of influence there wasa sharp upswing in the slave-trade to Brazil. This was caused by the removal of thePortuguese royal family from Lisbon to Brazil during the Napoleonic Wars. Special concessions were granted to the Brazilians and soon a flourishing trade in slaves wasbeing carried on around the Cape of Good Hope at Mozambique."[15]

"It is now an accepted fact among serious historians of East Africa that long distance trade routes between the interior and the coast were established exclusively throughAfrican initiative. In other words trade routes were forged by Africans from the interior going to the coast, not by the Arabs, or the Swahili, setting off from the coastinto the unknown, hostile interior. Swahili traders only began to for sake the securityof the coast in the second half of the eighteenth century, and travelled along wellestablished routes which had been developed decades before. Only after thenineteenth century was underway did Arab traders dare follow this lead."'[16]

"The Yao who were to become the most dedicated African slave-traders in EastAfrica, thus had a long tradition of carrying ivory and other legitimate goods to the coast decades before the combined French and Arab demand for slaves began to comeinto play."[17]"In West Africa these routes were driven inland from the coast by Africans who

wereprimarily seeking slaves. Slaves dominated the West African trade from the first.

In East Africa neither of these conditions was matched. The slave-trade must be seen inthe context of earlier, well-established, and profitable long distance trade which was based overwhelmingly on ivory. This is particularly important to remember for the southern region which was always the main reservoir for the East African slavetrade."[18]

Mr. Alpers concludes, "It should be clear by now that the old stereotyped idea thatmost slaves were seized by marauding bands of Arabs and Swahili traders is just another one of the myths which have grown up around the East African slave-trade.But we must not make a mistake by under estimating the role which these individualsplayed in this business."[19]

Once again, I should emphasise that my aim is not to ridicule the efforts of a handfulof moralists who were engaged in the propaganda against slavery. What I want toshow is that their efforts did not (and could not) succeed until the economic pressureforced Britain first to restrict slave-trade and then abolish slavery.

Of course, when Britain set out to abolish slavery it could not proclaim from the rooftops that it was abolishing it to compete against French industrialists. It had to turn itinto a moral and ethical issue before it could hope to pressure other governments tofollow suit. And so it did. We know how Britain waged wars not to protect itseconomic and political empire, but "to protect the Freedom of People." The same wasthe case with its war against slavery. Morality and ethics was an issue for a handful ofimpotent moralists only. The real issue, so far as the governments and the settlers andcolonialists were concerned, was economy.

Notes:

[14]. Alpers, op. cit., pp. 5-6.
[15]. Ibid, pp. 7-8.
[16]. Ibid, p. 13.
[17]. Ibid, p. 14.
[18]. Ibid, p. 15.
[19]. Ibid, p. 24.

Sufferings of Slaves

We have already seen what Islam did achieve in alleviating the plight of the slavesand how, for the first and last time in the history, slaves were regarded as humanbeings having rights upon their masters. Now let us see how the Christians treated their slaves.

Before giving the description, I must make one point clear. These accounts are of theplight of the slaves during the last five centuries when, as mentioned earlier, theChristians started slave-trade on a previously unimaginable scale. As I have shown inthe last chapter, the Arabs also gave them a willing helping hand in the last quarter ofthe eighteenth century.

As most of the European accounts of the slave-trade in Africa date from this period,so there are many vivid descriptions of what men saw there. Thus, the Christians mustbear the responsibility of these horrors in a far greater degree. They were inflictingthese injuries for four centuries compared with one century in which the Arabs joined hands with them on their instigation though quite willingly.

The victims were the poor and defenceless Africans, the Negroes of the west and eastcoast of Africa and also of the interior of that continent. They were treated as merechattels and tools or even worse. They had to work or rather they were forced to workin inhuman conditions on the newly acquired plantations of their masters, the Christian Western powers, who had taken possessions of the islands across the Atlantic and in the New World and also at home in Portugal and Spain and the countries of central Europe of the Holy Roman Empire under the spiritual domain ofthe Roman Catholic Popes.

The horrors of the slave trade were most pronounced during the last quarter of thenineteenth century. Wherever a raid on a village took place, death and destructionfollowed. Many more people died defending their homes and families, or as a result ofthe starvation and disease which usually followed such violence, than were everactually enslaved, let alone sold at the coast.

One shudders to think of the most diabolical ways in which the poor natives of Africa were captured, separated from their kith and kin, carried away and treated as worsethan animals. We shall now give a short account from the books of Western authorsthemselves on how the slaves were treated and what cruel methods were employed bythe slave hunters. Their methods were at once crude and wasteful, because they were robbers, not warriors. "Their practice was to surround some villages which they havemarked down for their prey, and approach it silently at night. The village was usuallya collection of primitive mud huts thatched with bamboo's and palm leaves, all highly inflammable, which they set alight without compunction, generally at dawn. As the inhabitants woke to the cracking of flames and struggled into the open, they were rounded up and made prisoners. Any of them who resisted were cut down, as the slavehunters had no mercy for them. They had no use for the old or infirm or for babeswho were all killed on the spot, and only men and women in their prime, and youngboys and girls, were spared, to be carried off into slavery, leaving behind the dead bodies and dying ashes, where once there had been happy homes and flourishingsettlements. The waste was out of all proportion to the prize. But waste, wantonwaste, was the hall-mark of the negro slavery, from its first moments to the last.Wherever it reared its head, death, disease and destruction were its invariable concomitants…

"Those captured far inland were less fortunate, for they had to march to the coast ontheir feet - a dreary trudge over many miles of thick forest and rough desert. Theywalked almost naked, with no protection against sharp thorns, and jagged stones. Toprevent escape, they had heavy forked poles fastened round their necks; their hands, ifthey were troublesome, might be secured through holes in a rough wooden board, andthey were fettered with chains on their ankles. Linked together by ropes, the long linesknown as coffles, they trudged miserably on towards their terrifying fate; for allAfricans knew that the white were fed on the negroes bought from the barracoons.Their captors drove them

relentlessly forward, ignoring wounds and lacerations, andphysicking their energy by plentiful flicks of the whips. If any succumbed, he wasthrown on one side; if any of them became too ill, they were left to die or moremercifully knocked on the head."[20]

"… In fair weather or foul, in spite of diseases and deaths, and for all the insurrectionsand suicides, every year the ships brought thousands of slaves to America and theWest Indies.. They came in ships of many nations - French, Dutch, Portuguese andDanish - but more than half were brought in English ships that sailed from Bristol,London, or Liverpool. Year in and year out, they were set ashore diseased or whole,resigned or despairing and were lost for ever to the land of their birth… The uses of-servitude, like its abuses, never change; they were the same all the world over andfrom one age to another. In America and the West Indies, as in ancient Rome, or inGreece or the dim beginnings of history, slavery was divided into two broad types -domestic slavery and the slavery of the works and plantations."[21]

Let us now give some more extracts from the same book Freedom from Fear or theSlave and his Emancipation by O. A. Sherrard, to show how and to what degree thefore most Christian nations of the West meted out the most inhuman treatment to thedefenceless Negroes. The reader would also see their debased beliefs and notionsabout human beings who differed from them in colour and race.

"From the broad historical outlook, they had passed through two stages: in the first bearing on their shoulders, like a patient Atlas, the glories of many long dead civilizations; and in the second, more wretched than the first, losing even thatvicarious honour, and failing to an abject state in which they contributed solely toprivate greed. Their condition, specially in their second phase, should have scared the conscience of a nominally Christian world, but left it peculiarly unmoved. The idea of slavery was so deeply ingrained that no one questioned its propriety. All nations either endured or enjoyed it."[22]

"The lot of plantation slave was really very hard. The job assigned to him was, from his point of view, skilled; he was to cultivate a crop unknown to him - for the most part sugar in the West Indies, cotton or tobacco in America - and, in that his work was novel, he endured a heavier burden than his counter part in Greece or Rome or among the serfs of

Europe.. All was new and strange to him; he had, therefore, to be broken in; he had to be taught his new duties; he had to be seasoned' as the saying was.

'Seasoning' was a euphemism for a harsh discipline, which was reckoned by the opponents of slavery to carry off not less than twenty per cent of those whounderwent it. May be that was over the mark, but it must nonetheless be admitted that large numbers died. The discipline was painful, and there was little to ameliorate andmuch to embitter its seventy.[23]

The slaves had to pass through terrible stages of suffering. The cumulative effect ofall the hardships was disastrous. To quote Sherrard again, "this was particularly true of the 'seasoning', for beyond doubt a large proportion of those who died under itsdiscipline would have died in any event from the effects of the middle passage.Experience showed that the greater number of those who were weak or emaciated onarrival, died soon afterwards whatever they did. The medical authorities put this downto 'long confinement in slave-houses previous to embarkation, want of cleanliness andventilation while on hoard the slave-ships, alterations in dress, food and habits, and,not the least, change of climate' (Buxton, p. 188). But they agreed that there wassomething more - a psychological or spiritual malaise, which they described, perhapsa little portentously, as 'the sad recollection of kindred and friendship, the rudeviolation of all the sacred and social endearments of country and relationship, and thedegrading anticipation of endless unmitigated bondage.' This when add to the physical hardships too often dissolved the will to live, and the slave seized the first chance todo away with himself, or more simply, pined away and died." There were at least fivetypes of owners and five forms of negro slavery - Spanish, French, Dutch, Danish and British - without counting America, which at the outset was British. The Americans,in the U.S.A, are even now, in the twentieth century, flouting their own laws and theNegro has not yet succeeded in securing full rights of citizenship, and there are problems for the Negro in his own home-land as the world knows too well.

The terrible fate of plantation slave is notorious - how he was branded with hot irons,how he was forced to work heavy chains, his back was torn and scarred with the lash,how at night he was locked in a prison, the ergastulum, often underground and always filthy. "The Portuguese

built a series of forts or barracoons as they came to be called,on the Guinea coast, where wretched Africans could be rounded up and kept safe till the numbers were sufficient to justify transhipment to Spain, to slavery… andeventually to America and the New World… their souls were doomed to eternal perdition; their bodies were the property of the Christian nation who should occupytheir soil."[24]

The author describes how slavery was introduced into England's colonies in America:"A Dutch ship was entering the James River in Virginia and landing twenty Negroesfor sale. The colonists promptly bought them and thus Negro slavery was introduced into England's American colonies." In a short time, "England acquired the first placein the coveted traffic in slaves, a position which she held for over ninety years."

"The slaves were sold at auctions, being bought in stark naked, men and women,alike, and mounted on a chair, where the bidders handled and prodded them and felttheir muscles and examined their teeth and made them jump and flex their arms, tosatisfy themselves that they were not bidding for a diseased or disabled lot. As the slaves were bought single, it followed that often husband and wife, children and parents went to different owners; and the loss of kith and kin and all that the slaves held dear was added to the loss of liberty. So the slave left the auction room, bereaved of everything, to begin a new life of 'abject, hopeless and crushing servitude'."[25]

Notes:

[20]. Sherrard, B.A., Freedom from Fear (London, 1959) pp. 61-62.
[21]. Ibid, pp. 67f.
[22]. Ibid, p.11.
[23]. Ibid, p. 69.
[24]. Ibid, p. 26.
[25] Ibid, p. 67.

Churches Participate in Slave-Trade

What was the attitude of the Christian church towards the Negro slave trade? From itsinception, Christianity kept its eyes closed to the plight of the slaves. As mentionedearlier, the only reference to the slavery is found in the epistle of St. Paul returning aslave to Philemon to his master. That is all. Ameer Ali rightly comments thatChristianity "found slavery a recognised institution of the empire; it adopted thesystem without any endeavour to mitigate its baneful character, or promote its gradualabolition, or to improve the status of slaves."[26]

To recognise the part played by the Christian churches in the slave trade one shouldread again the words of Mr. Alpers who writes, inter alia, that the Christians "wereaware that to sell their fellow human beings could not be morally justified. Yet theChristian church came forward with excuses for the slave-trade. Many prieststhemselves carried on slave-trading, especially in Angola, and many others ownedslaves in the Americas. The only reason the Catholic church give for its action wasthat it was trying to save African souls by baptising the slaves. The Protestants wereworse, for they did not even make it clear that they accepted that the Africans had asoul. Instead, they supported the view that the African slave was a piece of propertylike a furniture or a domestic animal. There is no part of the history of Christianchurch which was more disgraceful than its support of the Atlantic slave-trade."[27]

The arguments of James Boswell have already been quoted where he emphasises thatslavery was an institution sanctioned in all ages by God and that to abolish slaverywould be to shut the gate of mercy on mankind!

Now I quote from Capitalism and Slavery of Dr. Eric Williams, who was a recognisedhistorian and was also the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. He writes, "TheChurch also supported the slave trade. The Spaniards saw in it an opportunity ofconverting the heathen, and the Jesuits, Dominicans and Franciscans were heavilyinvolved in sugar cultivation which meant slave-holding. The story is told of an elderof the Church in Newport who would invariably, the Sunday following the arrival ofslaves from the coast, thank God that 'another cargo of benighted beings had beenbrought to land where they could have the benefit of a gospel dispensation.' But ingeneral the British planters opposed Christianity for their slaves. It made them moreperverse and intractable and therefore less valuable. It meant also instruction in theEnglish language, which allowed diverse tribes to get together and plot sedition… Thegovernor of Barbados in 1695 attributed it to the planters' refusal to give the slaveSundays and feast days off, and as late as 1832 British public opinion was shocked bythe planters' rejection of a proposal to give the Negroes one day in the week in orderto permit the abolition of the Negro Sunday market. The Church obediently toed theline. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel prohibited Christian instruction toits slaves in Barbados, and branded 'Society' on its new slaves to distinguish themfrom those of the laity; the original slaves were the legacy of the ChristopherCodrington. Sherlock, later Bishop of London, assured the planters that 'Christianityand the embracing of the Gospel does not make the least difference in civil property.'Neither did it impose any barriers to clerical activity. For his labours with regards tothe Asiento which he helped to draw up as a British plenipotentiary at Utrecht, BishopRobinson of Bristol was promoted to see of London. The bell of the Bristol churches pealed merrily on the news of the rejection of Parliament of Wilberforce's bill for theabolition of the slave-trade. The slave trader, John Newton, gave thanks to theLiverpool churches for the success of this last venture before his conversion andimplored God's blessing on his. He established public worship twice every day on hisslaver, officiating himself, and kept a day of fasting and praying, not for the slaves butfor crew. 'I never knew', he confessed, 'sweeter or more frequent hours of divinecommunion than in the last two voyages to Guinea.' The famous Cardinal Manning ofthe nineteenth century was the son of a rich West Indian merchant dealing in slavegrown produce. Many missionaries found it profitable to drive out Beelzebub by Beelzebub. According to the most recent English writer on the slave trade, they'considered that the best way in which to remedy abuse of Negro slaves was to set

theplantation owner a good example by keeping slaves and estates themselves,accomplishing in this practical manner the salvation of the planters and the advancement of their foundations'. The Moravian missionaries on the island heldslaves without hesitation; the Baptists, one historian writes with charming delicacy,would not allow their earlier missionaries to deprecate ownership of slaves. To thevery end the Bishop of Exeter retained his 655 slaves, for whom he received over12,700 pounds compensation in 1833.

"Church historians make awkward apologies, that conscience awoke very slowly tothe appreciation of the wrongs inflicted by slavery and that the defence of slavery by churchmen 'simply arose from want of delicacy of moral perception'. There is no needto make such apologies. The attitude of the churchmen was the attitude of the layman.The eighteenth century, like any other century, could not rise above its economiclimitations. As White field argued in advocating the repeal of that article of theGeorgia charter which forbade slavery, 'It is plain to demonstration that hot countriescannot be cultivated without Negroes.'.

"Quaker nonconformity did not extend to the slave trade. In 1756 there were eightyfour Quakers listed as members of the Company trading to Africa, among them the Barclay and the Baring families. Slave dealing was one of the most lucrativeinvestments of English as of American Quakers, and the name of slaver, The Willing Quaker, reported from Boston at Sierra Leone in 1793, symbolizes the approval withwhich the slave trade was regarded in Quaker circles. The Quaker opposition to theslave trade came first and largely not from England but from America, and there fromthe small rural communities of the North, independent of slave labour. 'It is difficult',writes Dr. Gray, 'to avoid the assumption that opposition to the slave system was atthe first confined to a group who gained no direct advantage from it, and consequently possessed an objective attitude.'…

"Slavery existed under the very eyes of eighteenth century Englishmen. And English coin, the guinea, rare though it was and is, had its origin in the trade of Africa. AWestminster goldsmith made silver padlocks for blacks and dogs. Busts of blackamoors and elephants, emblematical of the slave trade adorned the Liverpool Town Hall. The insignia and equipment of the slave traders were boldly exhibited for sale in the shops and advertised in the press. Slaves were sold openly at

auction.Slaves being invaluable property, with title recognised by law, the postmaster was the agent employed on occasions to recapture run-away slaves and advertisements werepublished in the official organ of the government. Negro servants were common.Little black boys were the appendages of slave captains, fashionable ladies or women of the easy virtue. Hogarth's heroine, 'The Harlots Progress' is attended by a Negroboy, and Marguerito Steen's Orabella Burmester typifies eight-eenth century Englishopinion in her desire for little black boy whom she could love as her long-hairedkitten. Freed Negroes were conspicuous among London beggars and were known asSt. Giles blackbirds. So nu-merous were they that a parliamentary committee was setup in 1786 for relieving the black poor.

"'Slaves cannot breath in England,' wrote the poet Cowper. This was licence of thepoet. It was held in 1677 that 'Negroes being usually bought and sold among merchants, so merchandise, and also being infidels, there might be a property inthem'. In 1729 the Attorney General ruled that baptism did not bestow freedom ormake any alteration in the tem-poral condition of slave; in addition the slave did not become free by be-ing brought to England, and once in England the owner couldlegally compel his return to the plantations. So eminent an authority as Sir Willi-am Blackstone held that 'with respect to any right the master may have lawfully acquiredto the perpetual service of John or Thomas, will remain exactly in the same state of subjection for the life,' in England or else-where."[28]

When ships loaded with human cargo sailed from Christian countries to Western hemisphere, Christian priests used to bless the ship in the name of Almighty andadmonish the slaves to be obedient. It never entered into their minds to admonish themasters to be kind to the slaves.

It is hard to believe but it seems that the Roman Catholics think it quite in keepingwith the teachings of their church to obtain slaves even in this era of 1970s. In August 1970 the world was shocked to hear that the Roman Catholics had purchased, at theprice ranging from 250 pounds to 300 pounds each, about 1500 Indian girls to shutthem into convents because European girls do not like to live as nuns.[29] There wasso much outcry in the world press that the Vatican had to establish a commission toenquire into this affair. But even before the commission started its enquire, a Vaticanspokesman had to admit that there was an

"element of truth" in the reports, though hedutifully condemned the Sunday Times for its sensation-mongering.

Notes:

[26]. Ameer 'Ali, Spirit of Islam (London: University Paper-backs, 1965) p. 260.

[27]. Alpers, op. cit., p. 22.

[28]. Williams, op. cit., pp. 42-5.

[29]. Sunday Times (London) as quoted in East African Standard (Nairobi), August25, 1970.

Chapter 12

Why Slavery Was Abolished

Someone may point out: Was it not the Christian Britain which finally abolished theslavery?

Well, if someone practices tyranny isn't he the one who has to give up that practice?As already explained, Britain was the biggest slave-trader; and when economic forcescompelled her to abolish slave-trade she did so. But does she or Christianity deserveany thanks for it? Should not we thank the economic forces behind that move?

The fact is that the movement against slavery was not spear-headed by Churches; itwas led by a handful of moralists whose cries remained unheeded till the economicnecessity compelled the Parliament to pass a bill in 1807 against slave-trade. After 26years, another bill was passed to abolish slavery itself in British-held countries in1833. As Professor D. W. Brogan writes in the introduction of Dr. Eric Williams'magnificent book Capitalism and Slavery, "the abolition of the slave-trade, then theabolition of the slavery, were not merely the results of a rising standard of politicalethics in Britain (although Dr. Williams does not dismiss as unimportant the work ofmen like Clarkson) but were a form of cutting of losses. The West Indies sugarmonopoly became intolerable to a booming industrial society, rightly confident in its in vulnerable competitive position in the early days of the industrial revolution." Tosummarise, in the words of Prof. Brogan, the slave system was "tolerated, defended,praised as long as it was profitable."

"It was highly profitable and for a long time. On the profits of the West Indiesplantations were based the fortune of Bristol and Liverpool and to some extent, of Glasgow. The West Indian planter was the rival in ostentation of the East Indiannabob.. It was in vain for moralists to point out

that every brick of the great warehouses of Bristol and Liverpool was cemented in Negro blood.. But the voice ofthe moralists was seldom overheard amid the chink of guineas (the very name recallsthe triangular trade between Britain, Africa and the transatlantic colonies)."

What the "triangular trade" meant? From England, sundry assortment "typical of theslave trader's cargo" was taken to Africa: "Finery for Africans, household utensils,cloths of all kinds, iron and other metals, together with guns, hand-cuffs and fetters."From Africa human cargo was taken to West Indies and Americas. From West Indiesand other colonies sugar, tobacco, indigo, cotton, coffee and other raw materials were taken to the mother country (i.e., England) where they were processed and then reimported.[1]

The plantations were founded on slavery and were protected by monopolies. Then came the secession of 13 colonies of America which closed a big market against theBritish held West Indies. Its another effect was that the now independent U.S.A.turned towards French held Islands of Saint Domingue (Haiti), Cuba and Brazil. Dr.Williams writes, "The superiority of the French sugar colonies was for the Britishplanters the chief among the many ills which flew out of the Pandora's box that wasthe American Revolution. Between 1783 and 1789 the progress of the French sugarislands, of Saint Domingue especially, was the most amazing phenomenon in colonialdevelopment. The fertility of the French soil was decisive, French sugar cost one-fifth less than Britain, the average yield in Saint Domingue and Jamaica was five toone."[2]

The disastrous effect upon British West Indies may be judged by the fact that "in 1775 Jamaica had 775 plantations; by 1791, out of every hundred, twenty three had beensold for debt, twelve were in the hands of receivers, while seven had been abandoned;and the West Indian planters, indebted to the enormous sum of twenty millions."Gradually, British planters irretrievably lost that ascendancy which they had so long enjoyed in the European Market. "French colonial exports, over eight million pounds,and imports, over four millions, employed 164,000 tons of shipping and 33,000sailors; British colonial exports, five million pounds, and imports, less than two millions, employed 148,000 tons of shipping and 14,000 seamen. In every respect thesugar colonies had become vastly more essential to France than they were toEngland."[3]

Thus the cost of sugar (and likewise of all such products) was becoming too high. Dr.Williams explains, "The West Indian monopoly was not only unsound in theory, itwas unprofitable in practice. In 1828 it was estimated that it cost the British peopleannually more than one and a half million pounds. In 1844 it was costing the country 70,000 pounds a week and London 6,000 pounds. England was paying for its sugarfive millions more a year than the Continent… Two-fifths of the price of every poundof sugar consumed in England represented the cost of production, two-fifths went in revenue to the government, one-fifth in tribute to the West Indian planter.."[4]

Gradually, Saint Domingue (Haiti) held by France emerged as the most importantsugar producer. From the standpoint of the British Prime Minister, William Pitt, thiswas the decisive factor. The age of the British sugar islands was over. The West Indian system was unprofitable, and the slave-trade on which it rested, "instead of being veryadvantageous to Great Britain… is the most destructive that can well be imagined by interests.[5] Therefore, Pitt turned to India to cultivate and produce sugar. "Pill's plan was twofold: to recapture the European market with the aid of sugar from India, andto secure an international abolition of the slave-trade which would ruin Saint Domingue. If not international abolition, then British abolition. The French were sodependent on British slave traders that even a unilateral abolition by England would seriously dislocate the economy of the French colonies.

"Pitt's plan failed for two reasons. The importation of East India sugar, on the scale planned, was impossible owing to the high duties imposed on all sugar not theproduce of the British West Indies.. Secondly, the French, Dutch and Spaniards refused.. to abolish the slave-trade. It was not difficult to see the political motives behind Pitt's cloak of humanitarianism. Gaston-Martin, the well-known French historian of the slave-trade and the Caribbean colonies, accuses Pitt of aiming by propaganda to free the slaves 'in the name no doubt of humanity, but also to ruin French commerce.' and concludes that in this philanthropic propaganda there were economic motives.

Then occurred a unique episode. The French planters of Saint Domingue, in 1791,fearful of the consequences of French Revolution offered the islands to England; soon Windward Island followed suit; Pitt

accepted the offer in 1793. Expedition after expedition was sent, unsuccessfully, to capture the island.

Dr. Williams comments: "This is of more than academic interest. Pitt could not havehad Saint Domingue and abolition as well. Without its 40,000 slave imports a year,Saint Domingue might as well have been at the bottom of the sea. The veryacceptance of the island meant logically the end of Pitt's interest in abolition.Naturally he did not say so. He had already committed himself too far in the eyes ofthe public. He continued to speak in favour of abolition, even while giving every practical encouragement to the slave trade… Pitt's reasons were political and only secondarily personal. He was interested in the sugar trade. Either he must ruin Saint Domingue by flooding Europe with cheaper Indian sugar or by abolishing the slavetrade; or he must get Saint Domingue for himself."[7]

"It would give Britain a monopoly of sugar, indigo, cotton and coffee… But if Pittcaptured Saint Domingue, the slave-trade must continue. When Saint Domingue waslost to France, the slave-trade became merely a humanitarian question…

"But the ruin of Saint Domingue did not mean the salvation of the British West Indies.Two new enemies appeared on the scene. Cuba forged ahead to fill the gap left in theworld market by the disappearance of Saint Domingue."[8]

"Whilst, under the American flag, Cuban and other neutral sugar still found a marketin Europe, British West Indian surpluses piled up in England. Bankruptcies were theorder of the day. Between 1799 and in 1807, 65 plantations in Jamaica were abandoned, 32 were sold for debts, and 1807 suits were pending against 115 others.Debt, disease and death were the only topics of conversation in the island. Aparliamentary committee set up in 1807 discovered that the British West Indianplanter was producing at a loss. In 1800 his profit was 2 1/2 per cent, in 1807 nothing.In 1787 the planter got 19/6d profit per hundredweight; in 1799, 10/9d; in 1803,18/6d; 1805, 12/-; in 1809, nothing. The committee attributed the main evil to theunfavourable state of foreign market. In 1806 the surplus of sugar in England amounted to six thousand tons. Production had to be curtailed. To restrict production,the slave-trade must be abolished."[9]

Thus, in the words of Dr. Williams, "abolition was the direct result of that (economic)distress."[10]

Notes:

[1]. Williams, Dr. Eric, Capitalism and Slavery, p. 65.
[2]. Ibid, p. 122.
[3]. Ibid, p. 123.
[4]. Ibid, p. 138-9.
[5]. Ibid, p. 146.
[6]. Ibid, p. 146-7.
[7]. Ibid, p. 147-8.
[8]. Ibid, p. 148-9.
[9]. Ibid, p. 149.
[10]. Ibid, p. 150.

Hypocricy Of The Abolitionists

If anybody wishfully thinks that the main cause of the abolition of slavery was moraland ethical development, he would be well-advised to look at the attitude ofabolitionists within the frame work of their economic aims.

Thus we see that the same West Indian interest holders who before the previouslymentioned distress were the ardent supporters of slave-trade now became enthusiastic"humanists". Dr. Williams says, "Ironically enough, it was the former slave owners ofthe West Indies who now held the humanitarian torch. Those who, in 1807, werelugubriously prophesying that abolition of the British slave-trade would 'occasiondiminished commerce, diminished revenue and diminished navigation; and in the endsap and totally remove the great cornerstone of British prosperity,' were, after 1807,the very men who protested against 'a system of man-stealing against a poor andinoffensive people."' The West India interest in 1830 put a resolution "to adopt more decisive measures… to stop the foreign slave-trade; on the effectual suppression ofwhich the prosperity of the British West Indian colonies… ultimately depends.Jamaican envoys, sent to Britain in 1823, declared that 'the colonies were easily reconciled to the abolition of a barbarous commerce, which the advanced civilizationof the age no longer permitted to exist' … A great mass movement for abolition of theslave-trade developed in Jamaica in 1849. Auj claplo, parties and sects were united onthe question of justice to Africa. They denounced the slave-trade and slavery as'opposed to humanity - productive of the worst evils to Africa - degrading to allengaged in the traffic, and inimical to the moral and spiritual interests of the enslaved,'and pleaded that 'the odious term "slave" be expunged from the vocabulary ofuniverse. SLAVERY MUST FALL, and, when it falls,

JAMAICA WILL FLOURISH.'England, they declared pointedly, had gone to wars for less justifiable causes."[11]

And what was the worth of all such high-sounding phrases may be judged from thefact that the British capitalism, even after destroying West Indian slavery, "continuedto thrive on Brazilian, Cuban and American slavery." So, in the words of ProfessorBrogan, "we get the paradoxes of the reversal of roles. It was all very well for theabolitionists to deplore the use of slave-produced sugar in the West Indies, but no oneproposed to stop the use of the slave-produced cotton from the United States. Indeed,no one proposed seriously to stop the use of the slave-produced sugar from Brazil orCuba. Money not passion, passion of wickedness or goodness, spun the plot".

Dr. Williams writes, "After India, Brazil and Cuba, by no stretch of imagination couldany humanitarian justify any proposal calculated to revet the chains of slavery stillmore firmly on the Negroes of Brazil and Cuba. That was precisely what free trade insugar meant. For after 1807 the British West Indians were denied the slave-trade andafter 1833 slave labour. If the abolitionists had recommended Indian sugar,incorrectly, on the humanitarian principle that it was free-grown, it was their duty totheir principles and their religion to boycott the slave-grown sugar of Brazil and Cuba.In falling to do this it is not to be inferred that they were wrong, but it is undeniablethat their failure to adopt such a course completely destroys the humanitarianargument. The abolitionists, after 1833, continued to oppose the West Indian planterwho now employed free labour. Where, before 1833, they had boycotted the Britishslave-owner, after 1833 they espoused the cause of the Brazilian slave-owner."[12]

"The barbarous removal of the Negroes from Africa continued for at least twenty fiveyears after 1833, to the sugar plantations of Brazil and Cuba. Brazilian and Cuban economy depended on the slave-trade. Consistency alone demanded that the British abolitionists oppose this trade. But that would retard Brazilian and Cubandevelopment and consequently hamper British trade. The desire for cheap sugar after1833 overcame all abhorrence of slavery. Gone was the horror which once wasexcited at the idea of a British West Indian slave-driver armed with whip; the Cuban slave-driver armed with a whip, cutlass, dagger and pistols, and followed by blood hounds, aroused not even comment from the abolitionists."[13]

Thus it is clear that the real reasons of the British humanitarianism was not so muchmoral uprightness or ethical awakening but the economic pressure and to harm theirbusiness competitors. In the words of Profess-or Brogan, the lesson of Capitalism and Slavery is chilling if not new:

"Where your treasure is there will your heart be also."

Notes:

[11]. Ibid, p. 175-6.
[12]. Ibid, p. 188.
[13]. Ibid, p. 192.

Chapter 14

- Was American Civil War to Emancipate the Slaves

I think it is in the interest of the readers to critically review the story that theAmerican Civil War was fought to emancipate the slaves. It is a myth, having norelation with reality. I propose to quote here from chapter 22 of Lincoln, the Unknownwritten by the famous author Dale Carnegie.[14] He begins with these words:-

"Ask the average American citizen today why the Civil War was fought, and thechances are that he will reply, 'To free the slaves'.

"Was it?"

"Let's see. Here is a sentence taken from Lincoln's first inaugural address: 'I have nopurpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the Stateswhere it now exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclinationto do so.'

"The fact is that the cannon had been booming and the wounded groaning for almosteighteen months before Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. During allthat time the Radicals and the Abolitionists had urged him to act at once, storming athim through the press and denouncing him from the public platforms.

"Once a delegation of Chicago ministers appeared at the White House with what theydeclared was a direct command from Almighty God to free the slaves immediately.Lincoln told them that he imagined that if the Almighty had any advice to offer Hewould come direct to headquarters with it, instead of sending it around via Chicago."

Further on, Dale Carnegie quotes from Lincoln's reply to Greedy's article 'The Prayerof Twenty Million':

"My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save ordestroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; andif I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving the others alone, I would also do that. What I do aboutslavery and the coloured race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union, andwhat I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help save the Union. I shalldo less whenever I shall believe what I am doing hurts the cause; and I shall do morewhenever I believe doing more will help the cause."

To explain that reply, Dale Carnegie writes:

"Four slave States had remained with the North, and Lincoln realised that if he issuedhis Emancipation Proclamation too early in the conflict he would drive them into the Confederacy, strengthen the South, and perhaps destroy the Union for ever. There wasa saying at the time that Lincoln would like to have God Almighty on his side, but hemust have Kentucky."

So he bided his time, and moved cautiously.

"He himself had married into a slave-owing, border State family. Part of the moneythat his wife received from the settlement of her father's estate had come from the saleof slaves. And the only really intimate friend that he ever had, Joshua Speed was amember of a slave-owning family. Lincoln sympathised with the Southern point ofview. Besides, he had the attorney's traditional respect for the Constitution and for lawand property. He wanted to work no hardship on any one.

"He believed that the North was much to blame for the existence of slavery in theUnited States as was the South; and that in getting rid of it, both sections should bearthe burden equally. So he finally worked out a plan that was very near to his heart. According to this, the slave-owners in the loyal border States were to receive fourhundred dollars for each of their Negroes. The slaves were to be emancipated gradually, very gradually. The process was not to be entirely completed until January1, 1900.

Calling the representatives of the border States to the White House, hepleaded with them to accept his proposal.

"The change it contemplates, Lincoln argued, would come gently as the dews ofheaven, not rending or wrecking anything. Will you not embrace it? So much goodhas not been done, by one effort, in all past time; as in the providence of God' it isnow your high privilege to do. May the vast future not have to lament that you have neglected it.

"The reader would remember that this plan of emancipation "that was very near hisLincoln's heart" was the same which had already been effected and practised 1300 years ago in Islam and which had produced wonderful results in the Islamic world.Had that plan been accepted by Lincoln's compatriots, there would not have been somuch racial hatred, internal strife, social upheaval and emotional instability which isstill persisting in the USA a century after the so called "emancipation of Negroes"there.

Unfortunately, the representatives of those border-states rejected that plan. Carnegiesays, "Lincoln was immediately disappointed. I must save this Government, ifpossible, he said, and it may as well be understood, once for all, that I shall notsurrender this game, leaving any available card unplayed… I believe that freeing theslaves and arming the blacks has now become an indispensable military necessity. Ihave been driven to the alternative of either doing that or surrendering the Union.

"He had to act at once, for both France and England were on the verge of recognisingthe Confederacy. Why? The reasons were very simple. Take France's case first."

Napoleon III was on the throne of France. "He longed to cover himself with glory, ashis renowned uncle, Napoleon Bonaparte, had done. So when he saw the Statesslashing and shooting at one another, and knew they were much too occupied tobother about enforcing the Monroe Doctrine, he ordered an army to Mexico, shot afew thousand natives, conquered the country, called Mexico a French empire, and putthe Archduke Maximilian on the throne.

"Napoleon believed, and not without reason, that if the Confederates won they wouldfavour his new empire; but that if the Federals won, the

United States wouldimmediately take steps to put the French out of Mexico. It was Napoleon's wish,therefore, that the South would make good its secession, and he wanted to help it asmuch as he conveniently could.

"At the outset of the war, the Northern navy closed all Southern ports, guarded 189harbours and patrolled 9,614 miles of coast-line, sounds, bayous and rivers. It was themost gigantic blockade the world had ever seen. The Confederates were desperate.They couldn't sell their cotton; neither could they buy guns, ammunition, shoes,medical supplies, or food. They boiled chestnuts and cotton-seed to make a substitutefor coffee, and brewed a decoction of blackberry leaves and sassafras roots to take theplace of tea. Newspapers were printed on wall-paper. The earthen floors of smokehouses, saturated with the drippings of bacon, were dug up and boiled to get salt.Church bells were melted and cast into cannon. Street-car rails in Richmond were tornup to be made into gunboat armour."The Confederates couldn't repair their rail-roads or buy new equipment, sotransportation was almost at a standstill; corn that could be purchased for two dollarsa bushel in Georgia, brought fifteen dollars in Richmond. People in Virginia weregoing hungry.

"Something had to be done at once. So the South offered to give Napoleon III twelvemillion dollars worth of cotton if he would recognise the Confederacy and use theFrench fleet to lift the blockade. Besides, they promised to overwhelm him withorders that would start smoke rolling out of every factory chimney in France night andday.

"Napoleon therefore urged Russia and England to join him in recognising theConfederacy. The aristocracy that ruled England adjusted their monocles, poured afew drinks of Scotch Whisky, and listened eagerly to Napoleon's overtures. The United States was getting too rich and powerful to please them. They wanted to seethe nation divided, the Union broken. Besides, they needed the South's cotton. Scoresof England's factories had closed, and a million people were not only idle but destituteand reduced to actual pauperism.

Children were crying for food, hundreds of people were dying of starvation. Publicsubscriptions to buy food for British workmen were taken up in the remotest cornersof the earth: even in far off India and poverty-stricken China. There was one way, andonly one way, that England

could get cotton, and that was to join Napoleon III inrecognising the Confederacy and lifting the blockade.

"If that were done, what would happen in America? The South would get guns,powder, credit, food, railway equipment, and a tremendous lift in confidence andmorale.

"And what would the North get? Two new and powerful enemies. The situation, badenough now, would be hopeless then.

"Nobody knew this better than Abraham Lincoln. 'We have about played our lastcard,' he confessed in 1862. 'We must either change our tactics now or lose the game.'

"As England saw it, all the colonies had originally seceded from her. Now theSouthern colonies had, in turn, seceded from the Northern ones; and the North wasfighting to coerce and subdue them. What difference did it make to a peer in Londonor a prince in Paris whether Tennessee and Texas were ruled from Washington orRichmond? None. To them, the fighting was meaningless and fraught with no highpurpose.

"'No war ever raging in my times,' wrote Carlyle, 'was to be more profoundly foolishlooking.'

"Lincoln saw that Europe's attitude towards the war must be changed, and he knewhow to do it. A million people in Europe had read Uncle Tom's Cabin - had read it and wept and learned to abhor the heartaches and injustice of slavery. So Abraham Lincoln knew that if he issued his Proclamation of Emancipation, Europeans wouldsee the war in a different light. It would no longer be a bloody quarrel over thepreservation of a Union that meant nothing to them. Instead, it would be exalted into aholy crusade to destroy slavery. European Governments would then not dare torecognise the South. Public opinion wouldn't tolerate the aiding of a people supposed to be fighting to perpetuate human bondage.

"Finally, therefore, in July 1862 Lincoln determined to issue his proclamation, but Mc Clellan and Pope had recently led the army to humiliating defeats. Seward told the President that the time was not auspicious, that he ought to wait and launch theproclamation on the crest of a wave of victory.

"That sounded sensible. So Lincoln waited; and two months later the victory came."

And so, to further the cause of Union War, the Proclamation of Emancipation was published in September 1862, which was to be effective on 1st January, 1863.

I have highest respect for Abraham Lincoln and he has been one of my favouriteheroes since childhood. But that respect is based upon the facts and reality; not uponmyths. He was a humanitarian and he, from the depth of heart, was against slavery.But it does not mean that we should glorify him by false propaganda. The reality wasthat he did not fight civil war to emancipate the slaves; rather he emancipated theslaves to win the civil war and save the Union.

Notes:

[14]. Carnegie, Dale, Lincoln: the Unknown (Surrey, U.K.:The Word Work Ltd, 1948)chp. 22.

Territorial Slavery

Up to now we have discussed one type of slavery, i.e., household slavery. But it wasmentioned in chapter one that slavery is of two kinds, the second being the TerritorialSlavery or subjugation of one nation by another.

Though the household slavery is now supposed to he abolished, the territorial slaveryis still very much alive. With a heart full of sorrow one notes the systematicdestruction of human lives and human dignity perpetuated by the Christiancivilization in almost all parts of the world.

Red Indians were the original inhabitants of the New World. Where are they now?They were gradually pushed out from their own lands and have been forced to live inless fertile rather unproductive patches of U.S.A. Aborigines of Australia weresubjected to the same treatment. Red Indians and Aborigines both were hunted likebuffaloes and now their number is nearing the extinction point. Dr. Eric Williamsquotes a story of the Indian chieftain, Hatuey, who doomed to die for resisting theinvaders, staunchly refused to accept the Christian faith as the gateway to salvationwhen he learned that his executioners, too, hope to get to Heaven.[1]

Even more tragic is the fate of the Africans in Southern Africa. Portuguese, armedwith the Pope's decree to "reduce the infidels to servitude" are tenaciously keepingAngola and Mozambique under the yoke of Territorial Slavery.

It is really astonishing to note that Pope Paul VI often issues statements on politicalproblems of the world; but has never seen it fit to advise Portugal to negotiate with its"subjects" in Africa and elsewhere.

Instead the Popes have maintained special relations with Portugal and Spain, the two Roman Catholic nations which stubbornly refuse to free their African colonies. In July 1970, Pope Paul VI received some leadersof freedom fighters of Portuguese African colonies. This audience infuriated Portugal,which issued a protest; Vatican nervously issued an explanation. Commenting upon it,the following letter entitled "Pope's Note A Comfort" was published in the StandardDar es-salaam (Tanzania), by 'A Black Roman Catholic':

"The news item 'Pope's note comforts Portugal' (Standard, July 11) refers. I quote therelevant sentences:

A Vatican note… said that Pope had received them (i.e., the leaders of liberation movements of Africa under Portuguese rule) as Catholics and Christians, withoutreference to their political functions. He reminded them to the Church's teaching thatpeaceful means should always be used even in seeking what one considers to be one'sright.

"The earlier news that the Holy Father had received the said leaders had perturbed memuch. Now this clarification has put my anxiety to rest. Let me explain why. It wasthe Roman Catholic Church which established Western colonialism by dividing all thenewly discovered lands and countries into two halves: giving the Spaniards theWestern half (like Americas), and granting Portugal the Eastern half (like Africa andIndia).

"Portugal's colonies in Africa are firmly founded on that important Papal decree.When I read earlier that Pope Paul VI had received the leaders of the Liberationmovements, I was surprised how was it possible. According to our beliefs of the Papalinfallibility, Pope Paul VI is bound to carry on and justify whatever was decreed byhis Holy predecessors. Therefore, according to my thinking he should not haveencouraged those leaders.

"Now his clarification has comforted me a lot spiritually. Now I may sleep in peacewith a sure knowledge that my Church has not condemned itself by implying that previous Popes were wrong in establishing and supporting the 'enlightenment' of thisblack continent under Portuguese Imperialism.

"Also, his advice to these so called 'victims of colonialism' to remain peaceful (i.e., todisband freedom-fighter units and beg Portugal to grant

them Uhuru) is the same oldwine in a new bottle. It reminds me of the invocations of priests of the RomanCatholic Church at the time of sailings of the slave-ships from Portuguese ports forWest Indies. They always prayed to the Almighty to ensure the safety of the ships andalways admonished the black slaves to behave gently and obediently. Of course, theydid not think it necessary to advise the masters of the slaves to think of them ashuman beings. I am glad that my Church has not changed during all these longcenturies."

South Africa's policy of Apartheid is universally condemned by UNO and elsewhere.But the Churches had always toed the line. It is only after the "change of wind" inAfrica and rapid emergence of independent African nations that the Churches haverealised the need to oppose the nefarious system which denies the original inhabitants of the country the right to work, walk, sit, ride, earn or sleep in their own land. Andeven when all other Churches, forced by the political necessity, have shown theiropposition to this type of slavery, the Dutch Reformed Church still supports thatinhuman system.

Rhodesia is following in the foot-steps of South Africa. A common African joke inthese parts of the world describes an African telling an European: "When you came,you had the Bible and we had the land. Now we have the Bible and you have theland.

"Apart from this blatant subjugation, there are other disguises in which the territorialslavery shows its face. Like a chameleon, it changes its colour according to theenvironment. Naked colonialism has now been replaced by neo-colonialism; but it still amounts to the same subjugation of nations and peoples by the superpowersthrough more subtle or not so subtle methods. We have seen what happened to theLeague of Nations. It has been replaced by the UNO, but when the weak nations cryand appeal for justice, diplomatic pressure is exercised and their just demands fortheir basic rights are shelved, or postponed. There is political blackmail, and thecolour of the skin is still a deciding factor. In fact the governing nations or those whoare powerful and well-equipped with instruments and means of wholesale destructionand annihilation, still hold their sway.

This type of slavery is practised today not only by Christo-capitalist nations but bycommunists also; and it will continue so long as human

society remains divided into the strong and the weak or until the existence of Omnipotent and All-powerful God isrecognised and His Sovereignty over the world is fully believed in and accepted.

Even now when the 20th century is marching towards its close and the Americanspride themselves on their achievements, the "Negro" question is in the forefront andstill unsolved. Despairingly, O.A. Sherrard says, "Slavery has existed from thebeginning and will last in one form or another as long as men lust after power. It hasresulted in more misery, more murder, more degradation, more sadness, suffering andsin than any other human institution. It crushes individuals; it blights communities; itsours all human intercourse, for its sign-manual is fear… It has dealt viciously with thepast, and perhaps more viciously with the present; for in modern forms slavery if lessobvious is more widespread and its fear more pervasive. The fear of a servile risingamong its satellites haunts the Soviet Presidium; the fear of a servile fate heightensthe tension between East and West; the fear of a servile revenge broods in SouthAfrica and overshadows the States; the fear of servile indignities, brain-washing,torture and sudden death, cows vast multitudes throughout the world."[2]

But we do not share this pessimistic view. We realise that the problem is gigantic, butwe also know that Islam is the Religion sent by Allah, the Omnipotent. Islam, 1400 years ago brought three-sided programme for eradication of slavery:

Blocking the ways of acquiring new slaves, emancipation, and restoration of thehuman dignity to the slaves. And the fact is that though Bani Umayyah sabotaged thefirst side of that programme by re-introducing slavery by purchase, they could notminimise the impact of the other two programmes. And the slaves in the Muslim world regained their lost human dignity.

A system which has shown its worth and which achieved success in fields where othersystems have utterly failed, will surely achieve the total eradication of every type ofdivision, segregation, inequality and inequity if it is given chance. Ameer Ali writes,"It remains for the Moslems [sic] to show the falseness of the aspersions cast on thememory of the great and noble Prophet [by the traducers and enemies of Islam], by proclaiming in explicit terms that slavery, [bondage in any shape and the

difference ofrace and colour are] reprobated by their faith and discountenanced by their code."[3] And we are sure that Islam will be given opportunity by Allah to establish full andcomplete justice in the world.

The Shi'ite Imams, the Divine Guides, carried on the work of the Holy Prophet andinstilled in their followers the true spirit of Islam. They, by their own examples andthrough sermons, preserved the original Islam for their followers.

And the last divine Imam, Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi (peace be upon him), theAwaited One, is to re-appear when this world will become full of injustice, tyrannyand dishonesty. When the Awaited One comes out from Occultation, he will fill thisworld with complete justice, honesty and mercy. We believe in a better world and weknow that whatever the disguise of slavery at the time of re-appearance of the TwelfthImam, the Awaited One, it is bound to disappear, vacating its place to universalbrotherhood and human dignity.

Notes:

[1]. Williams, op. cit., p. 8.
[2]. Sherrard, op. cit., pp. 188-189.
[3]. Ameer Ali, Spirit of Islam, p. 267

Postscript

The first edition of this book was published fifteen years ago. Many changes haveoccurred in this period on the world stage. The wind of change has blown away thePortuguese rule from Africa, giving freedom to Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau. Rhodesia's black majority has over thrown Ian Smith's "independence" of theWhite settlers, putting Zimbabwe on Africa's map. Spain too had to withdraw fromthe "Spanish Sahara".

I have re-read the preceding chapter (Territorial Slavery) to see if some changes wereadvisable. But it seems that no alteration would be justified. The fact is that no substantial change has occurred in the over-all picture. Rather the situation has gone from bad to worse - the flag in-dependence of some countries notwithstanding.

South Africa, with whole-hearted "ethical, philosophical and scriptur-al" support of theDutch Reformed Church, is relentlessly pursuing its policy of apartheid. In spite ofpressures from O.A.U, Commonwealth and UNO members, the United States and theUnited Kingdom have stubbornly refused to impose economic sanction against SouthAfrica. On the other hand, USA supports South Africa in its ventures to destabil-iseAngola and Mozambique.

The wave of Islamic awakening, with Islam's unambiguous stand against oppressionof man by man, or exploitation of nation by nation, is proving a stumbling block tothe oppressors of the weaker people. Not without reason, the 1986 Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church had de-clared that Islam was a great danger to South Africa - i.e., tothe idea of racial supremacy.

With all the propaganda being made by the super powers about the Human Rights, thesame powers go on unabashedly trampling the basic human rights of weaker nations.Their tentacles are strangulating the Middle East and Afghanistan, as well as Central America and Central Asia. Nor has the Vatican changed its stance vis-à-vis freedom movements and down-trodden masses.

Although the appearance of neo-colonialism has changed to some extent, its reality has not changed at all. It was thought better, therefore, to let the concluding chapter stand as it was.

Gopalpur, India

November 27, 1987

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